



# MARTIAL INDIA

*By the same Author*

BENGAL LANCER (200th thousand)

GOLDEN HORN (75th thousand)

LANCER AT LARGE (20th thousand)

YOGA EXPLAINED (5th thousand)

DOGS OF WAR (5th thousand)

EUROPEAN JUNGLE (20th thousand)

INDIAN PAGEANT (30th thousand)

# MARTIAL INDIA

BY  
F. YEATS-BROWN

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## NOTE

To thank all the kind people who have helped me in writing this book, and to acknowledge all the sources from which I gathered material, would be impossible; I would like, however, to recommend two official publications about the Indian Army in North Africa, *The Tiger Strikes* and *The Tiger Kills*; also to thank Mr. C. Cast for the maps he prepared from my pencil sketches.

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## PROLOGUE

*Sidi Barrani*

**D**URING those difficult days in 1940, when men and munitions were short, when England faced invasion, when Malta was in constant peril, and the Empire, swaying like a storm-bent oak, like the oak endured, Wavell was hard pressed for the defence of Egypt; he had only the 7th Armoured Division, the 4th Indian Division, and a few newly arrived British, Australian and New Zealand units—in all, less than 30,000 men. Against him were ranged 300,000 Italians. Guarding Khartoum, where the threat of invasion was equally serious, there was the small Sudan Defence Force and three British battalions, patrolling a thousand miles of frontier and faced by an enemy twenty times as numerous.

Naturally enough, the Italians were confident of reaching the Suez Canal by Christmas. All the ponderables were in their favour. They had the men and the equipment. Vast reserves of stores and petrol had been collected in Abyssinia and Eritrea; and from Libya, such was Marshal Graziani's numerical superiority, they might have attacked not only along the coast, but by raiding the Nile above Cairo.

On September 13th, 1940, Graziani occupied Sollum, which had been evacuated. Wavell had learned much about the enemy by this time, however, for units of the Armoured Division had been raiding deep into Libya ever since June, cutting water supplies, capturing prisoners, destroying tanks. They had even captured an Italian General on the Bardia-Tobruk road, sixty miles from the frontier. Such exploits were pinpricks, but they helped to establish a moral ascendancy.

The Italians made fine roads and built good camps, but they moved uneasily and slowly, as if in alien surroundings, whereas British patrols were soon at home in the desert. Nothing moved there without Wavell's knowledge. Thus rose the imponderable factors that make for victory.

As Graziani advanced Wavell fell back to Mersa Matruh, his artillery inflicting 2,000 casualties on the enemy by the

time he reached Sidi Barrani on September 16th. British losses were 150, and they had taken 700 prisoners since Italy entered the war.

Graziani now published a grandiloquent communiqué announcing the imminent fall of Egypt, but he did little else.

Some delay was understandable, because water was a serious problem for both sides; yet as autumn merged into winter, and the Italians remained immobile, or ventured out only for brief reconnaissances, and always in close hedgehog formation, David took a confident look at Goliath, though never a word was said about the pebbles in the former's sling.

\* \* \*

One of the pebbles was the 4th Indian Division, which had arrived in Egypt in July, 1939, with no motor vehicles and quite unprepared as regards equipment, for the war in which it was to engage. Neither officers nor men had ever handled an anti-tank rifle or a modern mortar. The men had been taught to drive, which they learned quickly, and to maintain their vehicles, which was a much longer process. Within a year, however, they became a force of which any commander might be proud.

In the cold and cloudy dawn of December 6th, 1940, the division moved out of its coastal camp to the east of Mersa Matruh and drove southward across the desert for fifty miles to Bir Kenayis. Here it remained for two nights, concealed and dispersed over a large area.

The cold was intense, and no fires were allowed. On Sunday morning, December 8th, the march was continued, and by 3.30 p.m. the division had reached its jumping-off point fifteen miles south of Nibeiwa Camp, having crossed fifty miles of open desert without being detected. "In olden days it would have been said simply that God had blinded the eyes of the enemy. It is difficult to think of any other adequate explanation."<sup>1</sup>

When darkness fell on that Sunday evening<sup>2</sup> the attackers

<sup>1</sup> *The Tiger Strikes*. Published by the Directorate of Public Relations, Delhi, India, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> The second Sunday in Advent. The first lesson for the day seemed to foretell the fate of the enemy: "Hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth; and their glory and their multitude and their pomp shall descend into it" (Isaiah v. 14).

moved to their assembly points. Three out of the four brigades of the division were to take an active part in the coming battle. The first attack was to be made by the 2nd Cameron Highlanders, the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles (*i.e.*, the 1st battalion of the 6th Rajputana Rifles) and the 4/7th Rajput Regiment. The other brigade consisted of the 1st Royal Fusiliers and the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles.<sup>1</sup> Another brigade was new to the desert, and held in reserve. The fourth was an all-British brigade—the Queen's, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the Leicesters. It will be observed that each brigade contained a British battalion; this is the invariable practice in the Indian Army. In this present operation, moreover, the artillery was all British, and so were the infantry tanks which led the main attack, and the 7th Armoured Division.

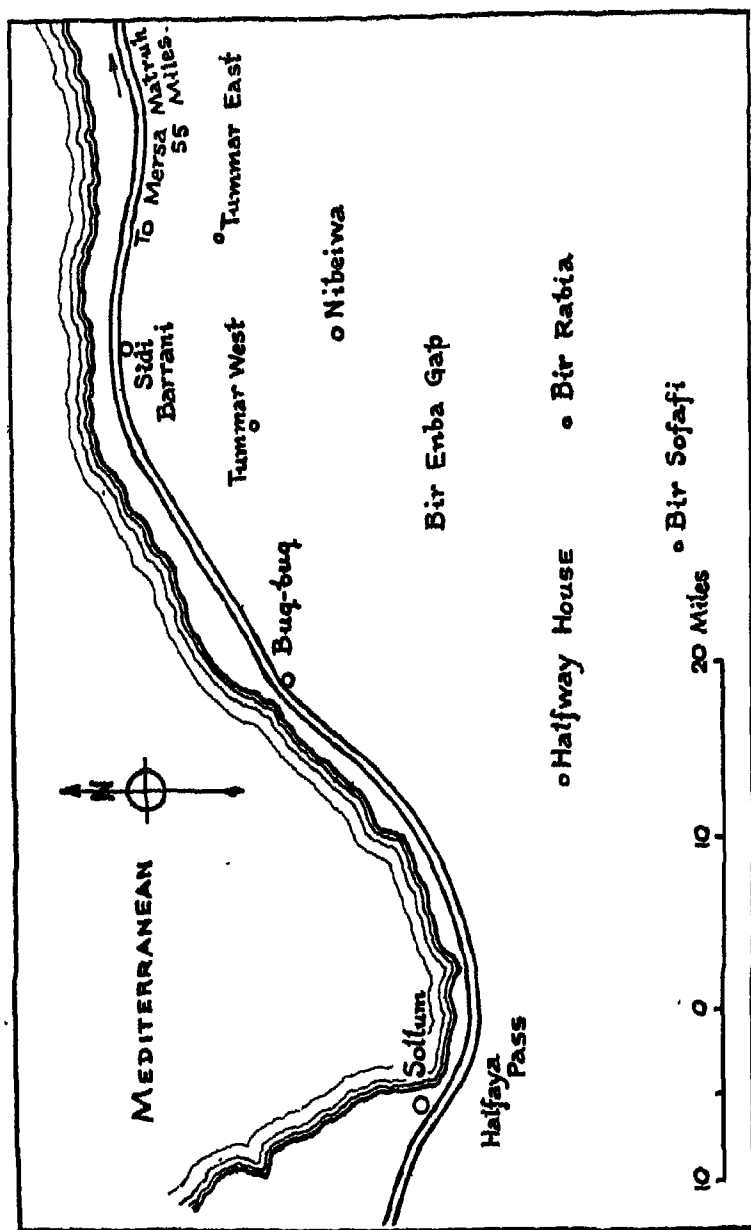
The exploits of the tanks in the ensuing days cannot be told here, nor the good work of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. All the world knows today that the war can be won only by the co-operation of all arms; and the Indian troops would be the first to acknowledge the achievements of their comrades. These comrades, on their side, are loud in their praises of the Indian soldier. I could name half a dozen Indian divisions whose discipline, endurance and valour are famous among the British who have fought with them. There are many more such divisions, of whom we shall hear soon.

\* \* \*

The plan was to send the Armoured Division through the Bir Enba gap, between the enemy camps at Bir Rabia and Nibeiwa, under cover of an infantry diversion to the east, and behind the Armoured Division to send a brigade of the 4th Indian Division to attack Nibeiwa from the rear.

The key point was Nibeiwa, a fortified position some two miles square, surrounded by a double stone wall and occupied by 4,000 men of General Maletti's mobile armoured column,

<sup>1</sup> The Rajputana Rifles were lucky to have two battalions in the division, and made good use of the favours of fortune, for up to the time of writing (January, 1944) they have earned the following distinctions: 2 V.C.s, 7 D.S.O.s, 17 M.C.s, 3 M.B.E.s, 30 Indian Orders of Merit, and 57 Indian Distinguished Service Medals. The two last decorations, roughly equivalent to the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal, are given only for acts of gallantry in the field. This record is unsurpassed in the annals of the Indian Army.



SIDI BARRANI

which was the spearhead of the three Italian divisions intending to attack Mersa Matruh.

These Italian divisions were scattered between Buq-Buq, Sidi Barrani, Maktila, Tummar West, Tummar East, Point 90, and other camps. Many more troops were coming east to reinforce them.

Once Nibeiwa had fallen, Tummar West and then Tummar East would be attacked. As a preliminary to these operations, Maktila was shelled on the night of December 8th-9th by the Navy to prevent the enemy from moving out in support of his camps to the south and west.

That Sunday night vast issues, perhaps the world's fate—for had things gone wrong the backbone of the Empire would have been broken at a moment when Britain stood alone, expecting invasion—depended on the leaders of the 4th Indian Division and the discipline and valour of its men.

Where would Wavell's troops have found water if they had been repulsed? How would he have defended Alexandria? Preparations for retreat were certainly made. Months of skilful planning preceded Wavell's attack, but he certainly took great risks for a great prize.

Bir Enba gap was empty. A brigade of the 7th Armoured Division moved forward, followed by the Cameron Highlanders and the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles. Once through the gap, the armour forked westward towards Buq-Buq, while the two infantry battalions, with their heavy tanks, forked north to their attack position north-west of Nibeiwa.

Inevitably there was noise, but meanwhile the 7th Rajput Regiment had been sent forward in their lorries to the east of Nibeiwa opposite the east face of the camp; they left their lorries and worked forward on foot. At 3 a.m. enemy listening-posts were met. Both sides opened heavy fire, and star shells and tracer bullets made a fine display, but, since the British had no artillery support, the Italians believed it was a feint attack.

Indeed it was a feint, but the enemy did not hear the armoured brigade go roaring through Bir Enba gap, nor did he know of the doom that was gathering in his rear, nor of the artillery that had assembled on his front.

At 7 a.m. on December 9th, 1940, the artillery from its position to the south-east of Nibeiwa began ranging on the



camp. Soon a hail of shells was falling on the somnolent Italians.

Then the infantry went in from the north-west.

Enemy tanks were in laager at this corner of the camp. Not one had been manned. Some were knocked endways. Others burned, while their ammunition exploded.

British tanks crushed down the walls of the perimeter. Soon the Camerons were amongst the enemy and liquidated the first half of the camp. The Rajputana Rifles, passing through dust and smoke, mopped up the remainder.

The speed and ferocity of the attack carried all before it. Maletti rushed out of his dugout and met his death from a tank's gun. The enemy soon began surrendering in large groups.

By 8.25 a.m.—fifty minutes after the attack was launched—Nibeiba was in British hands, with 4,000 prisoners, many guns and lorries, and a vast quantity of stores.

Rising wind swirled up the smoke of burning trucks and ammunition dumps. A dust-storm was on the way, giving cover for the advance to Tummar West, though it also increased the difficulty of the leaders of the exploiting columns. By 10 a.m. the Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Punjab Regiment were in position, but the weather was then so thick that the assault could not be launched until 1 p.m.

Operations at Tummar West followed a similar plan to that at Nibeiba. British and Indians went in with tremendous dash. Havildar Kalyan Singh of the 1st Punjab Regiment had his Bren carrier set on fire by a hand-grenade. He wrenched his red-hot gun from its mounting and went into action on foot, getting badly burned in doing so.

By 4 p.m. Tummar West was taken, with another 3,000 prisoners and many vehicles and stores.

The 4/6th Rajputana Rifles were detailed for the attack on Tummar East; they were counter-attacked on their way there and killed several hundred of the enemy, but it was then too late for the assault.

Darkness fell over the desert before the day's gains could be fully assessed, but evidence of enemy collapse was clear. Fires blazed amidst exploding dumps. Many thousands of prisoners were being assembled. Reconnaissance planes reported confusion on all westward roads, and bombing was creating havoc

amidst retreating convoys, jammed tight in the Halfaya bottleneck.

At earliest light next day (December 10th) the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles entered Tummar East without opposition. Point 90 surrendered later, after a token resistance. The attack on Sidi Barrani was carried out by the British brigade, while Indian units guarded the flank and acted as a reserve. Other units of the division continued their task of mopping up, taking thousands more prisoners.

On December 12th the division was out of the front line, thirsty and grimy, weary and unwashed, but conscious of a job well done. In three days it had taken 20,000 prisoners, with enormous booty. Its casualties were only 700. Three enemy divisions and Maletti's mobile group had been annihilated. Egypt had been saved.

Wavell swept on to Benghazi. In the sixty-two days between the battles of Sidi Barrani and Beda Fomm 133,295 prisoners and 1,300 guns were captured.

Alas! the 4th Indian Division did not take part in the pursuit, for on December 12th it received orders to leave the battle. Its destination was naturally kept secret, nor could the men know the desperate shortage of men which compelled Wavell to switch his strategical reserve from Egypt to the Sudan, and later back again, like a stage army passing and repassing the footlights.

It was not inactive for long. In January, 1941, it was advancing into Italian East Africa. In March it was fighting gloriously on the Keren heights; then it was switched back to counter the German attack in Libya, and in June part of it was hurried across to Syria, so that in six months it had served in three theatres of war. We shall follow its adventures and those of the equally distinguished 5th Indian Division in subsequent chapters.

India has two million volunteers fighting in the Allied cause. It is the largest—and, I think, the least publicised—army of volunteers ever gathered under any flag.

# I

## *Village Life*

**M**ANY backgrounds might be chosen, amongst the seven hundred thousand villages of India, against which to portray the fighting man: the palm trees of Madras, the saw-toothed mountains of the far north, the Mahratta uplands, or the fascinating plains of the Ganges with their curtain of snow-capped Himalayas; but any common denominator is obviously impossible. Let us therefore drive to Jatnagar, a village in the Southern Punjab, from which come Hindu, Moslem and Sikh soldiers. You will not find it on the map, but those of you who know India will recognise it as somewhere not far from the highway trodden by Kim and his *guru*.

It is a fine April morning, leading you to suppose (and how mistakenly!) that the Indian climate is as good as any in the world. Double banks of trees line the famous Grand Trunk Road, leading from Peshawar to Delhi: pale green shishams, dark green mango trees, and small, spiky kikrs. Some of the trees have silver leaves, and some gold, and here and there, amidst varying shades of green, a coral tree stands out in its livery of scarlet.

Ox-carts and buffalo-carts move sedately north and south, carrying raw sugar, and straw, and sacks of grain, while others are parked by the roadside, their teams chewing the cud. They move at two miles an hour, twenty miles a day, carrying a ton and a half of produce on their solid wood wheels.

Women in many-coloured *saris*—glittering groups of pink and daffodil and sky-blue, with some black *saris* spangled with silver—sit by the roadside with their plainly dressed menfolk (an off-white loin-cloth and drab shawl) eating barley porridge and drinking buttermilk. Their naked children, adorned with silver earrings and nose rings, are sharing the meal, or playing noughts and crosses in the dust beside them.

Many of these family groups have a dog waiting for scraps. Even the beggars who line the road to a temple by the Jumna, where I walk in the early morning when in Delhi—beggars with no roof over their heads in the bitter cold of a Delhi winter—

keep a couple of mongrel bitches with a litter of puppies to share their poverty.

Queer-looking camel-carts, with large back wheels and a cage-like body, are part of the pageant of the road. Since they are no faster than the bullock-carts, and can carry only half the load, it is strange to find them so much used; but they have been passing this way for centuries, so they must have some hidden advantage.

Eventually, motors will displace camels and oxen. At present, however, only a few ramshackle buses ply this route, emitting clouds of oily smoke, and carrying incredible loads. Internal-combustion engines, like trains, telegraphs and telephones in India, seem to develop powers of endurance unknown in other countries, and a capacity to function almost without maintenance.

So with bicycles, which frequently carry three adults, or more children. Two-wheeled tongas are supposed to hold four people, *including the driver*, but along the *Grand Trunk Road* you will see eight or nine passengers—say half a ton's weight—being drawn by a gallant country-bred pony who lives on a handful of grain a day mixed with chopped straw. Fares are 8d. a head for twelve miles, and double this distance is often covered in a day, even when the thermometer stands at 120° Fahrenheit in the shade.

Today is cool. A few days ago there was heavy rain, and a dangerous hailstorm, which might have crushed the crops over thousands of miles; but the young wheat stands, the air is bracing, and the great green plains look beautiful under the glitter of the spring sun.

Green parrots fly above us, with their curving flight and hysterical twitter, monkeys play amongst the mango trees, a white-headed stork stands staring, a hare bolts, grey squirrels (which the pedant insists are rats) go skirmishing across the road.

We pass an Englishman, who might be myself thirty years ago, in white Jodhpur breeches, exercising a string of polo ponies. Who is he, I wonder, and what can he be doing, this war-time ghost risen from a happier past?

What will the British be doing here—if anything—in ten years' time? To prophesy is foolish, but of this I am sure: whatever kind of independence India achieves, the rural community will want some of the British to stay. Millions of Indian

peasants have loved the young British subaltern who commanded them, and the friendly British soldier with whom they were brigaded :

“Not the princes and prelates with periwigged charioteers  
Riding triumphantly laurelled to lap the fat of the years,”

but their comrades in arms; and this old friendship, which began a hundred and fifty years ago, is a far more potent force than the politicians care to admit, at least in public.

\* \* \*

An elderly man signals to me to stop. He is a Jat farmer, a prosperous, clean-shaven, burly yeoman, clad in a homespun *dhoti* (a wide cloth hanging in folds from the waist, and tucked in between the legs) and khaki jacket. He wears a fine white turban, sun spectacles, country slippers with turned-up toes, and grasps a brass-bound bamboo stick.

Seeing me in uniform, he explains that he has a son in the Army. A son captured in Burma. Do I know how the Japanese are treating prisoners? Alas, how can I answer? The truth, so far as I know it, is too gloomy to repeat, but one day the war will be over.

We pass a tall old man in saffron robes, with a flexible bamboo yoke on his shoulders, from which two brass pots are dancing. My companion tells me that he is carrying Ganges water to his village. How does he know? Presumably because holy men are carrying Ganges water to this village all the time. Not water from the Jumna, only twenty miles away, but water from the holier and more distant Ganges.

Instead of flashing by this ascetic at fifty miles an hour, I ought to get down, and spend a month in his company, for he represents a changeless India, or at least an India which is changing very slowly: rural Hindu India. Why do I hurry on? The answer is simple. “So little time!” I have to write this book, not another about ascetics. Simple, but wrong. I hurry because I have caught a fever that grips half the world.

I have flown—or rather I have been carried by air—from Cairo to Delhi, from Delhi to Peshawar, from Peshawar to Bombay, from Bombay to Imphal on the Burma border, then back to Delhi, and soon I propose to fly to Italy and England.

Thousands of miles and thousands of men will have passed before my eyes, but what is all my seeing worth if I miss the heart of India, the villages where the men are bred who shape her destinies?

The saffron-robed ascetic is behind us, in a cloud of dust. Let us not forget his symbolic figure, lean, dignified, unhurrying, without worldly possessions, save for the precious water which he is carrying to his brethren, because innumerable Hindus share his views on life. Two hundred million Hindus, or two hundred, and fifty million Hindus, believe in a religion—or rather a religious system—whose fundamentals you cannot grasp by travelling about India in cars or 'planes or dining with distinguished Indians in the best hotels.

Young Indians may tell you that religion no longer influences the masses of their countrymen. It is not true. Religion may have lost its grip on the urban educated classes, but even among these you would be surprised, if you took a group of high-caste young Hindus who allege that they are atheists, and stripped them to the skin, how many would be wearing the sacred Brahminical thread round their necks. The European equivalent would be to find a member of the Union of the Militant Godless carrying a crucifix concealed.

The faith of the masses remains untouched. This year I attended an enormous convention of Hindus praying for world peace. No doubt the saffron-robed ascetic attended it too. The Maha Yajna, or Great Purification, as it is called, had last been performed three hundred years ago, in the time of the Emperor Aurungzeb. Now the world was again in an evil plight, so the leaders of orthodox Hinduism—from Mount Abu, Calcutta, Benares, the high Himalayas and the great temples of Madura and Rameswaram—decided to hold the ancient ceremony once more.

A huge *mandap*—a thatched roof on pillars—was erected opposite the Red Fort in Delhi, with a platform at the eastern gate, on which the Planets could alight on earth to witness the sacrifice. Under the *mandap*, one hundred *kunds*, or pits, were prepared for the sacrificial fires. The original fire was lit according to Vedic ritual, by the friction of two pieces of wood; it was then passed from one *kund* to another. Each *kund* was served by fifteen priests, chanting invocations to Brahm, the most high and unknowable God; and after the repetition of

each *mantra* (prayer) they sprinkled oil seeds mixed with wheat and honey on the fire. Every two hours throughout the day they were relieved by another group of priests, so that a million prayers were said daily; ten million during the whole Yajna.

A tented city grew up round the *mandap*, to accommodate the thousands of holy men who had assembled, and the million visitors who attended the rites. No one save Brahmins might enter the *mandap*, but visitors were allowed to make a circuit of the outside provided they went barefoot, or in their socks. In the party I accompanied, a highly placed Government official took his place among the pilgrims, accompanied by his family, and his baby son, carried shoulder-high by a servant in the gold and red uniform of the Imperial Secretariat. Every Hindu Minister in Delhi came to worship at the Yajna.

A simple description of the Hindu religious system is impossible, because a Hindu may believe in one God, or many, in one religion, or several, or none, and in reincarnation, or in the extinction of personality at death, and still remain an orthodox member of his community. Almost the only thing he *must* do is to respect the cow, which means in practice that he must not eat beef.

I might add that he must keep within the rules of caste; that is, eat only food prepared by members of the caste in which he was born, or by a member of a higher caste, but this would not be quite accurate, for any Hindu who takes the requisite vows of poverty and asceticism can free himself from caste restrictions. But the prohibition concerning beef is strict. I have seen a Hindu officer, a prisoner of war in Turkey, dying of a broken heart under my eyes because he had decided to set an example to his men by eating beef, in order that they should not starve.

Although the Hindu system appears nebulous when a short theoretical definition is attempted, it is—in this country of contradictions—an entirely positive creed to the individual. (Gentle reader, I am not straying from my subject; there are about nine hundred and fifty thousand Hindus fighting in the Allied ranks; and to understand them one must know something about the faith they hold.)

The early religion of the Hindus was an exalted form of nature worship, enshrined in four very ancient books of hymns known as the Vedas. (The Rig Veda is thought to have been composed and memorised about 1200 B.C.) Being a pastoral

people, they particularly venerated the cow, which remains a central figure in Hinduism, almost, but not quite, a goddess.

Modern Hinduism derives from the Code of Manu (dating from about 200 A.D.), which divided the population into priests, warriors and merchants (Brahmins, Rajputs and Vaisyas), who were the master-people, and the Sudras, or non-Aryans, who were servants.

From these original castes thousands of others have arisen through the centuries, each denoting a profession or calling. Worship of One God, Brahm, is the basis of their belief (theoretically, therefore, no Hindu can be called an idolater) but this one God, being incomprehensible, has three aspects on earth as Brahma (to be distinguished from Brahm) the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Siva, the Destroyer of Mankind.

Brahma is rarely represented in temples, but his consort Sarasvasti, the goddess of learning, literature and music, who rides on a peacock, with a *vina* in her hand (a stringed instrument like a violin), is often to be seen in temples belonging to learned priests.

Siva or Mahadeo, although the Destroyer of Mankind, is also the incarnation of the reproductive power of nature, and is often represented as a lingam (that is, the male reproductive organ) or as a bull. His *shakti* (that is, the female aspect of his divinity) is the terrible goddess Kali, who was the patroness of the thugs, and is still propitiated as the goddess of smallpox.

Siva has two well-known sons, Ganesh, the merchant's god, and the bringer of good luck (he has a fat body and an elephant's head), and Kartikkeya, with six heads and six arms, the god of war.

Vishnu, the Preserver, has Lakshmi as his *shakti*, the goddess of wealth and beauty, sprung from the foam of the ocean. He has come to earth nine times to redeem mankind, his last three incarnations, or *avatars*, being Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. A tenth *avatar* is expected at the end of this era of history. Buddha is no longer worshipped in India. Rama and Krishna are the two most popular Indian deities among the masses, the former always depicted with a bow, and the latter with the flute with which he charmed the milkmaids of Muttra.

Just as Vishnu has nine *avatars*, so every human being is subject to the operation of *Karma*, the law whereby the deeds of an individual shape his next existence.



This belief in reincarnation is held by probably nine-tenths of Hindus—say, 200,000,000 people—and explains much about them that is otherwise difficult to understand.

The Christian, like the Moslem, believes that "brief life is here our portion" and that "now we fight the battle, but then shall wear the crown." Not so the Hindu.

For the Hindu there is no escape from the chain of existences, except by becoming a great saint: the common run of mankind must work out its individual salvation through a long succession of lives on earth. If you are a Maharajah or a rich Brahmin you must live up to the good position allotted to you by the Lords of Karma, and if you are a high-caste soldier you must be smart and brave for the same reason. *Noblesse oblige* is a precept well understood in Hindustan, but the noble has no idea or intention of considering himself the equal of the lesser breeds. Similarly, the common man has no sense of inferiority. His place in the social scale has been chosen by the gods who govern human destiny, and there is no point in questioning a law of nature. He may rise in this life to be a millionaire or a general (one of Akbar's best commanders was a grocer by caste), but he cannot in this life expect to sit at table with a Brahmin. Why should he want to? In another existence he may find himself a high priest; and he has a large part of eternity before him in which to fulfil his destiny. Hinduism does not exactly deny democracy, but it removes it to another plane: it asserts that we are not equal in this world, and cannot be equal, but that we are all God's children, and that all of us shall have wings when we deserve them.

Without discussing reincarnation as a philosophy, we may note its inspirational value, and the undoubted fact that it has solaced countless millions of the human race. There is a great deal of brotherhood and kindness in Hinduism, which has endured for thirty centuries or more, and has promoted many high philosophies.

\* \* \*

I dropped my fellow-traveller in a town on the main road, and arrived soon afterwards at the outskirts of Jatnagar, where a sacred peacock paced among the dungheaps, followed by seven wives, the sun glistening on his plumage. Near-by, in a crescent of *siris* trees, sacred monkeys chattered like people at a cocktail party.

The scene was a harmony of curves and colours: the mounds of cow-dung to be used as fuel, the straw-ricks, the pond, the sweep of the peacock's tail, four oxen with fawn hides and black muzzles circling round a threshing floor, the brown of the rich earth, the silver *siris* pods, the curved white spire of a temple amidst green foliage—a placid heart-resting picture.

I drove slowly along a narrow, dusty, rutted track, past the huts of the village servants living outside the pale of the land-owners and farmers, and came to a paved approach leading to my host's house. It was the only paved road in the village.

It would be profitless to describe the house, for my host lives in European fashion. The cups he won at various tournaments, regimental groups, swords and signed photographs from several Viceroy's adorn the living-room. At luncheon I met a dozen of the pensioned sardars (Indian officers) of the village, who talked of regimental days and ways, and of the last war, and wars before that: calm, wise, hearty greybeards, each one a successful farmer now.

In the streets of Jatnagar Hindus, Moslems and Sikhs meet and mingle, and buy from the same shops. The visitor to this countryside will see no sign of religious feuds, any more than a traveller will see them in Bombay or Delhi. Such things lie below the surface, and it certainly is not my purpose to drag them up, or to exacerbate them in any way. Yet to assert that the creeds live together without quarrels would be false.

Their womenfolk meet only when shopping, although here they are all of the Jat race, a people of Aryan descent, with a mixture of Scythian blood. They are among the best farmers and soldiers in the Punjab, of whom a proverb says that a Jat baby has a plough handle as a toy in his cradle. Originally they were all Hindus, but many have been converted into Moslems and Sikhs.

Jatnagar consists of about a thousand houses, mostly built of mud mixed with chopped straw. The schools, post-office, and some of the better houses are brick-built. Each family has a courtyard, where its beasts are tethered at night. There is no water supply, except from wells, to which the women go morning and evening. A gutter runs down the centre of each lane, carrying drainage: pools of stagnant water spread from places where it has been blocked by refuse.

A temple stands under a *banyan* tree, at the foot of which

there is a marble bull, Nandi, the vehicle of Siva, its neck wreathed with marigolds. An old priest sits cross-legged before it, swaying backwards and forwards as he reads aloud from a Sanskrit book. Doves perch on the temple wall, or flutter round the *banyan*. In another part of the village you will find a mosque, and in yet another part a Sikh *gurdwara*. There are separate clubs for the men of the three religions, mud platforms under trees. The women's clubs are the well-heads.

Here in the main street are some sweetmeat shops, selling confections of honey and clarified butter, or of maize and sugar; and coconuts, raisins, dates and roseleaf jam. Also cloth merchants, displaying some of those brilliant *saris* we have seen by the roadside; and a chemist selling drugs composed according to formulæ unknown to the West, such as leaves of thinly beaten silver to cure impotence, and ivory powder compounded with fat as a hair restorer. The majority of the remedies, however, are against malaria, dysentery, plague and snake-bite. A million people in India die of malaria every year, and twenty thousand of snake-bite.

Delicate and delightful silver brooches are being made by a working jeweller; also heavy silver anklets of masterly craftsmanship. Jat girls of well-to-do parents wear eight anklets on their wedding day, each weighing four pounds. The silver is usually bought in ingots in Delhi, and worked into ornaments in the village, under the eyes of the bride's family. They cost £10 each; and one would think that people who can afford to adorn the legs of their daughters with thirty-two pounds' weight of silver, worth £80, would demand modern living conditions in their homes. In fact, however, their domestic arrangements have changed but little in the last thousand years. Novelty makes no appeal to them; and they are suspicious of reformers.

\* \* \*

From the courtyard of a soldier's house I can glimpse some hurrying and scurrying in the rooms beyond, for the younger women are in *purdah*,<sup>1</sup> and must hide themselves. Furthermore, this being a Hindu household, the women are probably putting away food which might be contaminated if it were accidentally touched by an outcaste such as myself.

<sup>1</sup> *Purdah* women wear the *sari* over their faces if Hindus, and the *burqua* if Moslems.

There is a patch of vegetable garden in the courtyard, where onions and egg-plants are growing, also a graceful little acacia. Cooking is done on a cow-dung fire by the door of the house, where milk and vegetable stew are at the moment simmering.

We enter a scrupulously clean living-room, some fifteen feet by ten—the size of a small cottage room in England—with mud floor and walls and raftered ceiling. There are no glass windows, only apertures of bricks placed chequerwise provide light and ventilation. In winter they are covered with blankets, and the place is dark save for a hurricane lamp; however, life is chiefly passed in the sunlight, and soon after sunset the family sleeps.

A three-colour photogravure of Krishna with his lute is the only decoration in the room: a crude, vital, lively picture. A shelf holds a dozen highly polished copper pots of diminishing sizes, a dozen brass drinking-cups, and some plates, all neatly ranged and clean. A lacquer spinning-wheel and some large chests occupy a corner; the latter hold the family linen and clothing, doubtless put away with a layer of moth-detering *nim* leaves. A divan and a cradle complete the furniture.

An elderly lady is sitting on the divan, rocking a baby. Beside her on the floor squats a girl of five or six, wearing small diamonds in her ears. The child looks enchanting, and so does this handsome, clear-skinned "grannie," with her white hair and all her own teeth. Lucky for me that she has reached an age when it is no longer immodest to speak to strangers.

The diamonds in her grandchild's ears are an heirloom, she says. Yes, she knows that Brayne Sahib<sup>1</sup> thinks children should not wear jewellery, and she agrees with him. He is a great and good man, but what can you do with people who won't take advice? Her daughter has a will of her own. She treats the house as if it were hers. Babies? Why am I interested? How many children have I? Hereabouts a baby at birth weighs about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  seers.<sup>2</sup> It is kept at the breast for a year; that is the custom. As to weaning, that is quickly done. Children get just ordinary food at ordinary times, but less of it when they are

<sup>1</sup> Colonel F. L. Brayne, late of the Indian Civil Service and one of the most remarkable men in India, is a pioneer of the Rural Reconstruction Movement.

<sup>2</sup> Six pounds.

small: *rabri*, *dhud*, *chapattis*, *sag*, *dhal*, *kedgeri*, *ghi*, *gur*, *makan*, *dhai*.<sup>1</sup>

She herself has had ten children, and was married at sixteen. None of the women of her family married before sixteen. Of course many girls marry earlier, but it is a mistake. This is a soldier's family. Would I care to see her husband's medals? Her eldest grandson is a soldier too, fighting in the famous 4th Division, somewhere across the Black Water. Everyone in the world has heard of the 4th Division. The Italians and the Germans run like hares when they see the Jats; but her grandson has been fighting over there too long: it is time he came home. Here are the medals: Tirah Campaign, South African War, the Mohmund Expedition. Wars didn't last for ever in those days.

\* \* \*

The men's quarters are upstairs. They are bare, mud-walled, mud-floored rooms, containing nothing but string beds. An exception is the grandchild's room, left as when he was last here. A tennis racket and a hockey stick lean against a corner, and a photograph of lovely Devika Rani, the Indian film star, is pinned over his bed, which actually has a mosquito net. There are no books that I can see, but perhaps they are packed away. When he returns, will he have developed a taste for playing darts, and drinking *vino*, and reading the morning papers? Will he and his comrades reform the Indian countryside, as Brayne hopes? . . .

\* \* \*

Men of all classes are recruited for the Indian Army, and I should be giving a wrong impression if I described only how

<sup>1</sup> *Rabri* is wheat porridge, which is taken with milk (*dhud*) or butter-milk (and sometimes with tea and sugar) at about 6 a.m. The midday meal, taken out to the fields when the men are at work, consists of three to six *chapattis* (flatjacks of unleavened wheat meal) with *sag* (vegetables) and *dhal* or *kedgeri* (two kinds of pulse) with clarified butter (*ghi*) and unrefined sugar (*gur*). The same kind of meal is taken after sunset, on return from work. *Makan* is butter, *dhai* milk-curd. Jats are particularly fond of milk, of which an adult often drinks two pints a day. Moslem Jats eat meat as well. Needless to say, diets throughout India vary with climate and creeds. It is usual to rest after the midday meal for at least two hours; beasts as well as men require this pause in the burning heat of summer.

the prosperous small farmers live. (Not that they are always prosperous, or even generally: their livelihood depends on the fickle monsoon.) Let us visit the grain-cutters, who scoop up grass for fodder, half-cropping it with the owner of the field, and the tanners, weavers, saddlers, barbers, washermen, sweepers.

These people live in a quarter apart. Some of their houses are tidy and clean, others are wretched hovels inhabited by slatternly women, children with sore eyes, dejected goats, mangy dogs. Nobody troubles about how the village servants live. If they are good servants, no doubt they will have their reward in their next reincarnation.

\* \* \*

Life is not all hard work in the Indian countryside. There are no amusements such as professional football, dog-racing, or cinemas, but there are wrestling, hockey, fairs, festivals, pilgrimages, and marriages with lavish feasts to crown them.

Today an Indian Armoured Corps display is being held in a mango-grove two miles away. Thither let us go with the gaily clad stream of spectators. Seeing these fine, tall men and women one feels that whatever is wrong with India there is a good deal that is right. They eat the right sort of foods here. Not always enough of them; still, they don't get rickets and spongy gums. . . . Will the Indian peasant be more content when he has tractors and combined harvesters in every community centre, internal plumbing and television sets in every house? And with these blessings will he keep his teeth?

\* \* \*

Anyway, here there is progress. Progress is being brought home to the people in a way you would see nowhere else on earth. Tanks are not demonstrated and explained to the English who make them; but necessity has compelled the Indian Government to do so. The Indian Army is entirely voluntary, and you cannot direct a flow of volunteers as you would an intake of conscripts. You must cajole and convince; and the purpose of this display is to show rural India that young yeomen must become tank-minded. The days of the horse are past, and the Bengal Lancer of today drives an armour-plated steed.

A loud-speaker is relaying the voice of the squire opening the display. Simultaneously comes the rumble and stutter of two Stuarts and a Lee, followed by three Humber armoured cars and two carriers. Soon the squire runs dry. Now a duffadar<sup>1</sup> of the Indian Armoured Corps comes to the microphone to tell us about the Stuart. It costs two and a half lakhs, he says (£19,000), and weighs 12 tons. Some of his information seems to me rather technical, but the crowd drinks it in.

A hundred yards away a group of women—eighty or ninety, perhaps, but it is hard to tell how many—are clustering round the 35-ton Lee with its menacing gun. A picturesque group they make, in their brilliant *saris*, swarming over the steel leviathan. The demonstrators are two women.

"Women come in their hundreds every day," says the Major in command of the show. "They used to hover on the edge of the crowd, too shy to come forward, for they don't like mixing with men. But now they have their own lecturers—the wife of the Commissioner found them for us. She knows everyone, and everybody loves her. Tanks are becoming fashionable. In some places we have a thousand women at a time. Yesterday an old lady of eighty insisted on climbing into the Lee and looking through the periscope and the gunsights and sitting in the driver's seat. She said her favourite great-nephew was a tank gunner. Some of them ask the most intelligent questions about fire-power and speed. And these women lecturers know the answers. All the answers. There's nothing about a tank they don't know."

I walked round the side-shows, which included the lay-out of a sowar's kit, showing his month's pay in silver rupees, and the excellent clothes he wears, and another lay-out demonstrating the excellent food he gets, and a breakdown lorry, and a stripped gun, and a field-pellet range, and a couple of nautch girls, presumably not provided by Army Headquarters.

Here are the volunteers: a dozen boys, stripped to the waist, lined up before the recruiting officer's table. Doctors and dentists and a subordinate recruiting officer have already seen

<sup>1</sup> Non-commissioned ranks in the I.A.C. are named as in the days of cavalry—duffadar and lance-duffadar, corresponding to sergeant and corporal. In the infantry the corresponding ranks are havildar, naik, and lance-naik, for lance-corporal. A trooper in the I.A.C. is called a sowar; an infantry private is a sepoy.

them and have scribbled signs in yellow chalk on their chests and stomachs: their weight, height, estimated age, caste, district, unit for which they seem most suitable, standard of education, and state of their teeth.

How I should hate to stand there marked "K.K." or "C.E." ("knock-kneed" or "cross-eyed") to be stared at by the village friends I most cordially dislike!

When the District Recruiting Officer arrives a venerable old man appears with a petition. His age is one hundred years, and he served in the last Great War, and in Waziristan, and now, having quarrelled with his relations, he wants to be back in uniform. Fight? Of course he can fight! That is the only trade he knows. We shake hands, and somebody leads him away. He is not quite sane: one of those old soldiers who never die.

\* \* \*

The armoured battle is beginning, and the children are almost delirious with excitement.

Tanks wheel and drone, dust rises, rockets whiz, Véry lights go curving over the trees. Everyone is entranced, especially when the tanks fire their 3-inch mortars.

\* \* \*

Next morning I met the two lady lecturers. They were both Moslems. Both their husbands were in the Army. They had been travelling for four months with the recruiting team. "It's hard work sometimes," said the elder lady, "but we enjoy every minute of it. We Punjabi women want to know how our men fight."

\* \* \*

The mosque in the Moslem quarter of Jatnagar is used every afternoon by a class of children—girls as well as boys—who sit for an hour or so intoning the sonorous Arabic of the Koran. I shocked the young *maulvi*, who was teaching them (he was a doctor of divinity, trained in the El Azhar University of Cairo, and had made the Mecca pilgrimage) by asking whether the children understood what they were saying. Of course they understood! He had explained every word of the Holy Book.

There is nothing complex about Islam, and no effort of the imagination has to be made (as it has to be made for Hinduism) in order to grasp the basic ideas which are summed up in the



*Kalimah*, or creed, consisting of a single sentence: *La illaha illa'llah Muhammad Rasulu'llah*—"There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."

The founder of the faith of Islam was born at Mecca on August 29th, A.D. 570. He died at Medina on June 8th, A.D. 632. Like his father before him, he was a merchant. He made many caravan journeys, to Syria and elsewhere, and was a highly respected member of the leading family of Mecca, the Koreish.

At the age of twenty-five he became the manager of the estate of Khadija, a wealthy widow, whom he afterwards married. Of his four daughters by Khadija, the best known to history is the youngest, Fatima, through whom is descended the nobility of Islam, the Sayyids.

Muhammad's call came to him when he was forty. Long before this he had been shocked by the immorality of the people of Mecca, and had been accustomed to retire to the desert for long spells of prayer and meditation. It was only after much self-questioning that a direct revelation from heaven decided him to preach to his brethren and wean them from idolatry to the worship of one God. Thereafter he never turned back from the task, in spite of many trials and persecutions.

It would be impossible to tell here the story of his rise to power, and how the Holy Koran was revealed to him, chapter by chapter, in sonorous, majestic, rhythmic words: poetry which every Arabic scholar agrees has never been equalled in the language.

Moslems dislike being called "Muhammadans" because the author of the Koran specifically disclaimed divinity; he was the medium through which God revealed His commands, as He had done aforetime, through Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, who are also Prophets of Islam.

Islam is a brotherhood. At the doorway of the mosque to which the Caliph used to go, in the days when there was a Caliph, he was greeted by a servant, who gave him a title which the Popes also use: "Remember, O Padishah," he cried, "that thou art the servant of the servants of God."

Intoxicants of all kinds are forbidden by the Koran, and this prohibition is held by the learned to include tobacco, though many Moslems do in fact smoke. The flesh of the pig is unclean, and no meat may be eaten unless the animal has been killed by severing the jugular vein. Prayers should be said five times a

day, before dawn (as soon as a black thread can be distinguished from a white one), at noon, in the afternoon (when a shadow is double the length of its object), after sunset, and at night. The rising and the setting of the sun must be avoided as times for prayer, because it is then that idolaters worship the sun.

If one would sense the power of Islam in its simplicity, beauty, and brotherhood, one should hear the Imam of the Juma Masjid in Delhi<sup>1</sup> reading the Friday prayers before a congregation of twenty to thirty thousand people. Here are the words of the bidding prayer, from the first chapter of the Koran :

In the Name of God,  
Most Merciful and Compassionate,  
Ruler of the Day of Judgement,  
Thee do we worship,  
And Thee entreat.  
Guide us in the Straight Path,  
The Path of those Thou hast blessed,  
Not the path of those who have incurred Thy wrath,  
Nor of those who have gone astray.

After a moment of silence the Imam says : "*Allahu Akbar*" —"God is great." The people raise their hands, touch their ears, then fold their hands, with heads bent. The dignified ritual of bowing, bending, kneeling follows, actions that did much to discipline the Arabs of the Prophet's day, and that since then have united 209,000,000 Moslems throughout the world.

There are 94,389,428 followers of Islam in India, of whom some 600,000 are in the Forces.

\* \* \*

The Sikhs are a relatively small community—numbering 5,691,447—of whom about 300,000 are serving the Allied cause, the highest proportion of any race in India.

Orthodox Sikhs never cut their hair, and may be recognised

<sup>1</sup> The Imam is the Leader of Prayer, and is the ninth descendant of the Imam who was brought by Shahjehan from Bokhara for the opening of the Great Mosque in 1656. The Juma Masjid has been described as "the perfection of man's effort to testify to the glory of Almighty God." As a Christian I should choose Westminster, Canterbury, Chartres or Bamberg, or the parish church of Winchelsea; but I can well understand the Moslem feeling for Shahjehan's glorious fane.

in manhood by their beards, which they curl under their chins. The five "distinguishing marks" of a Sikh (only the first two are visible), however, are uncut hair, a steel or iron bracelet on the wrist (to remind him of his soldier's creed), a wood comb, a dagger, and a pair of short drawers. The latter are worn under the uniform or plain clothes: they were instituted by the last prophet to replace the *dhoti*, which Guru Govind considered unsoldierly.

No man is a Sikh until he is baptised as such with water and with steel. He then adopts the marks aforesaid.

The Sikhs are a reformed sect of Punjabi Hindus, founded by Nanak Chand, a weaver of Lahore, who was born in A.D. 1469. Nanak studied many philosophies, and his travels took him as far as Mecca. Like Buddha, he led a revolt against the caste system, idolatry, and the excessive power of the Brahmin priesthood; he also condemned child-marriage, infanticide, and pilgrimages to shrines, the last because they wasted time and encouraged superstition. After his death in A.D. 1538 he was succeeded by nine other Gurus, or teachers, the last of whom was Guru Govind (1675 to 1706), who established his disciples as a religious and military confraternity known as the *Khalsa*, the Brotherhood of the Elect.

In spite of frequent and cruel persecutions by the Moghul Emperors, the Sikhs endured and flourished, bound together by the book of the hymns of their Gurus, known as the *Granth Sahib*. In their chief shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, you may see their bible being read by *mahants* (Sikh priests) without pause or intermission throughout the twenty-four hours, while music is played (curiously enough, by Moslems) and incense is offered to the holy book.

When the Sikhs ruled the Punjab their armies used to take a copy of the *Granth Sahib* into battle, as the Ark accompanied the Israelites. Although this is not done now, the squadron leader of a reconnaissance unit in Italy, whose men are Sikhs, told me that the *Granth Sahib* has a place of honour with his "Echelon B" transport, cushioned in precious silks, according to custom, and enclosed in a special box, above which nothing may be placed. His men wanted it carried in one of the leading armoured cars, but their leader wisely refused to expose it to risks unknown in former times.

No Sikh will smoke, and even the smell of a cigarette or pipe

is disagreeable to him; no doubt the original ban against smoking was instituted to differentiate the members of the *Khalsa* from their Moslem oppressors, who smoked but did not drink. The majority of Sikhs enjoy their rum or whisky.

I have seen only two races in the world who really like fighting, the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.<sup>1</sup> In peace-time the Sikhs are difficult men to command: they are given to intrigue, and need a firm hand; but put them in a hot corner, and they live up to their title of Singh, which means a lion. In Mesopotamia in the last war the Arabs called them the Black Lions.

I have never met a despondent Sikh in the front line. In a hospital in the rear he will moan dreadfully over a small wound, but in a fight he will go on to his last breath, and die laughing at the thought of Paradise, with the battle-cry of *Khalsa ji ki jai* as he falls.

This very cry, a friend told me, came over a field telephone in the Arakan when a Sikh signal-havildar had been cut off beyond hope of rescue. The line remained live. The havildar described to my friend how the Japanese were creeping up. A pause, then he came back to say that he had killed a skirmisher, but that now his ammunition was exhausted. "There's not much time, Sahib. I'll break the telephone before they get me. Victory to the Holy Brotherhood!" They found him dead beside an enemy he had brained with the butt of his Sten.

A remarkable people, the Sikhs, with their Ten Prophets, five distinguishing marks, and their baptismal rite of water stirred with steel; a people who have made history, and will make it again.

\* \* \*

Suddenly the heat cracked down on Jatnagar. It was April and high summer was overdue. One day the shade temperature was 75° F., the next it was nearly 100° F.

These figures, I am afraid, will convey little to the Western reader. He has possibly experienced an occasional shade temperature of 90° F. or 95° F.; but that bears no resemblance to the Indian hot weather. When the temperature stands day and night at over 100° F. week after week, month after month, all the complicated bodily mechanisms of combustion are working in reverse, cooling the skin instead of keeping it warm. This is

<sup>1</sup> I deal with Gurkhas and other races in the next chapter.

a truism, yes; yet we constantly forget that life in summer over large areas of India cannot be the same as life in Europe: the orain as well as the body must adapt itself to strange conditions.

We also sometimes forget that these conditions affect the Indian just as much as they do the European. We must not discuss the affairs of India as if holidays in the Himalayas, ice, servants, electric fans and air conditioning were possible for the masses. We must remember, if we can, what it is like to live in the burning plains from the middle of April to the middle of July, when even the birds are liable to drop dead from heat stroke.

Bracing cold in winter, staggering heat in summer, and a capricious rainfall that blesses the land or leaves it a desert; such are the conditions under which three-quarters of a million recruits are born and nurtured.<sup>1</sup>

Weaklings die in North India; the survivors are a fine stock. If they do not embrace what we consider progress as quickly as we wish, there may be practical reasons against it.

A classic example is the "improved plough," an admirable instrument with one defect, that Indian oxen were not strong enough to pull it. Then India should have better cattle? Certainly, but to feed them you must convince the peasant that it is legitimate to kill worn-out cows, of which there are some fifty million at large, eating the available fodder.

You must also do much else, which Brayne and others have expounded more fully than is possible here. It could all be done, given the leaders, and if they are to be found they will be amongst the soldiers, sailors, and airmen returning one day to places like Jatnagar.

<sup>1</sup> The Punjab, with a population of 28,419,000, has sent this number of men to the fighting services.

## II

### *Soldiers at Work and Play*

MUTTRA is famous in Hindu myth and history as the place where Lord Krishna dallied with the milkmaids. It is now an enormous Field Artillery Training Centre. A new *avatar* of Krishna seems passing over the land, a god who rides a gun-limber instead of a placid bull.

I knew the cantonment<sup>1</sup> well long ago in the piping days of peace. It was a quiet place then, inhabited by some hard-riding gunners with whom I used to pigstick, but now everyone is too busy to ride, and five thousand people have established themselves where there used to be only five hundred. They have spread over nine square miles of barracks and parade grounds. Soon, I am told, the garrison will be double its present size.

Work is divided into three main sections: for field gunners, anti-tank gunners, and for drivers. Training equipment is on a liberal scale. It was hard to come by until the middle of 1942, while the Empire paid in blood for its years of dream and chatter.

Classes of men enlisted include Madrassis, Mahrattas, Pathans, Punjabi Moslems, Sikhs, Rajputs, and Ahirs (the last being a Hindu caste who originally followed the profession of goatherds), so that we find here a good cross-section of India's fighting men.

Recruits generally have little schooling when they arrive; some 80 per cent. are quite illiterate. Many Madrassis cannot speak Urdu,<sup>2</sup> and must be taught that language as well as enough English to understand orders. They are quick to learn, however (quicker than the Punjabi) and many of them have greatly distinguished themselves in the field.

"Practical experience of the performances of Indian units in the present war has exploded the myth that Northern India has a monopoly of martial races"—thus a notice which I saw pinned up in the recreation room of a Madrassi mess. It con-

<sup>1</sup> A military area close to a city.

<sup>2</sup> The camp language of the Moghuls, composed of Persian and Hindi, now more or less of a *lingua franca*, though it is not well known in the south.

tinues with the story of how a battery of South Indians in the Middle East knocked out fifty-seven German tanks.

The battery was eventually overrun, but fifty-seven German tanks was a good bag. This unit has since returned to India, and when Lord Wavell arrived in Delhi in October, 1943, it was chosen to fire the Viceregal salute of 101 guns.

Before the war, although many Madrassis were enlisted, the bulk of the Indian Army was recruited and trained in the Punjab. British officers tended to apply for Punjab regiments because of the opportunity for active service on the North-West Frontier; moreover, when an officer proved unsatisfactory, yet not sufficiently bad to entail dismissal, he was sometimes transferred to a down-country regiment; hence the latter suffered in the quality of their leaders, though the men were excellent material.

They have always been excellent material. In the days of the East India Company there was no harder taskmaster and no general less lavish in compliments than Sir Arthur Wellesley, afterwards Duke of Wellington, yet this is what he said of the Madrassis: "I cannot write in too strong praise of the conduct of the troops. The sepoys astonished me. They have manifested bravery and discipline in action, which are the characteristic qualities of the best soldiers."

Stilted praise; still, the sepoys did astonish this general who was so rarely surprised. Since his day no one is surprised when the Madrassis distinguish themselves; the Madras Sappers and Miners, for instance, are one of the most famous units in the Indian Army.

The province of Madras, with its population of 49,342,000, contains 87 per cent. Hindus, 8 per cent. Moslems, 5 per cent. Christians. Several companies of Madrassi Christians have been recruited since the eighteenth century, and are excellent soldiers. Nowadays their numbers have greatly increased, and many are serving in the technical branches of the three Services.

The Dekhani Moslems are a race with a fine military tradition; many of them are serving in the Indian Army. The majority of Madrassis, however, are Hindus, and they are in every branch of the war effort—combatant, technical, and administrative.

\* \* \*

To return to our embryo gunners.

It is hard for us Western people to realise the great gap which must be bridged by an Indian boy when he leaves the Middle Ages in which he has been living and enters the Age of Steel. Possibly he has never travelled before in a train. Certainly he has never worn army boots and uniform. It is a far cry from the peasant twisting a bullock's tail to the soldier-driver engaging a synchro-mesh gear, or to the gunner using a clinometer sight.

No one has ever suggested, as his mentors do now, that he should write a weekly letter to his family. (If he is illiterate, still he is urged to write by the hand of a friend.) He was probably pampered at home, like most boy babies in India. Now he is always being ordered about. Always. He can't even make his bed the way he wants. Folding his clothes, putting them on, tying his turban, walking, running, standing—everything is done in a new way. All this drill seems to him silly when he remembers the rhythmic labour of the fields and the well-known problems of cattle, and water, and the neighbour's boundary. He is often homesick, but rarely admits it.

It takes time to settle down, and nowadays this is well understood. In the Recruits' Reception Centre he finds some games, such as *chappar* (a kind of draughts), which he played at home, books, papers (he can look at the pictures, at least), a radio, and a gramophone with the songs of nautch girls that remind him of the birthdays and betrothals of his childhood.

Then there is Education, with a very large E. It is not so strange to the modern recruit as it was in my time. In my day (I was adjutant of my regiment for four years) it was considered rather smart to be illiterate, as it was in mediæval England; indeed, I have heard the opinion advanced by worthy Indians of the old school that reading is bad for the brain, and, to tell the truth, I am sometimes disposed to agree. However, nowadays it is obvious even to the stupidest yokel that promotion and pay depend on knowledge of English. The present war, with its varied opportunities, is driving a ploughshare through ancient prejudices.

The gunner recruit is confronted by all sorts of mechanisms. He must know how to come into action, lay the sight, set the fuse, fire, and limber-up; also something (at least) about the theory of ballistics and indirect fire, ammunition supply, and



telephones. Drivers must learn the theory of the internal-combustion engine, running repairs, and so on. All three branches must be able to count in English, read the time, and use a compass and a map.

Can they learn all these things in six months? No, but they learn the rudiments before going on to other more specialised courses.

\* \* \*

In spite of war-time cramming, the soldier has time for play. I watched some wrestling matches in Muttra, and I wish my English and American friends who judge Indians by the clerkly classes they meet in London or New York could have seen these young men with their powerful chests and muscles like whipcord. There are more soldiers than students in India, and they are better representatives of the real spirit of the nation.

The wrestlers were locked together, straining and gasping, then a brown and glistening body would flash through the air, landing with a thump on the matting. Quicker than eye could follow, his adversary was astride him, trying to force both shoulders down simultaneously, but the other writhed free, and in an instant attacked again. Clinch and fall followed each other like lightning, varied by interludes of sparring for an opening.

The bouts were watched by a large crowd, who knew all the fine points of the game, for wrestling is a traditional Indian sport. So, nowadays, are cricket and hockey.

When I stroll about Old Delhi I see urchins bowling and batting on a patch of rock-like earth, and nearby, close to the battlements of the Kashmir Gate, there are also white-flannelled undergraduates playing cricket on coir matting, with all the pomp of umpires, careful placing of the field, and stately progression of maiden overs. Big matches are watched by big crowds, and reported in the newspapers as fully as in England.

At hockey, India has beaten the world at the last three Olympic meetings. Throughout the length and breadth of the country you may see soldiers playing the game, also half-naked children, often in bare feet. Future historians may say that British games were more important to India than law-courts, roads, railways and canals.

\* \* \*

Now to Ambala, headquarters of the famous Mountain Artillery (Lord Roberts' old corps), which has fought in every campaign waged by the Indian Army: a hundred expeditions and two Great Wars since it was raised in 1836. In this war, the Mountain Gunners have been in action wherever danger or glory leads, in Malaya, Burma, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, East Africa, Sicily and Italy. To tell the story of their exploits would be to write another book.

They have difficult loads to handle, and their men are chosen for strength and height, as well as other qualities. I saw a team of recruits, with only two months' training, lifting three-quarters of a ton of metal—cradle, breech, barrel and wheels of their howitzer—off the back of eight mules, and marrying the mechanisms together in under two minutes. To me it seemed a miracle, yet my guide declared that a fully trained team can do the job in sixty-five seconds.

\* \* \*

There was a school for the children of the Indian staff at Ambala, which interested me particularly, because thirty-five years ago I tried to get the children of my rough-riders to come to school, and failed, owing to the prejudices of their mothers, bless them, who clung to the habits of the harem. They were conservatives, like so many good women the world over, and the best I could do about the children was to arrange a garden party, at which we organised games and distributed prizes and sweetmeats.

Nowadays there are many children's schools in the Indian Army. The one at Ambala was a particularly happy place. Some of the needlework was very good, and I am the proud possessor of a tablecloth, with sapphire birds and flowers, embroidered by a Jat girl of fifteen. Do you say this has nothing to do with India at war? But indeed it has!

\* \* \*

As I have said, we find amongst the gunners most of the fighting men of the Indian Army. (Except Gurkhas.) No more than a glance at the main races is possible here; they are as various and dissimilar as the martial clans of Europe.

Let me introduce the famous Punjabi Moslems, who are often called the backbone of the Indian Army. There are many branches of the prolific and sturdy "P-Ms," differing much in appearance, speech, and origin, for each tribe represents some

wave of invasion. The handsome, long-haired Tiwanas, who used to serve only in the cavalry, claim to be descendants of the horsemen of Alexander the Great; while the big-boned Awans, from the Salt Range, trace their ancestry to the marauders who came with Sultan Mahmoud of Ghazni. What they have in common are Islam, land-hunger, and stubborn courage. Of late they have been enlisting in the Royal Indian Navy and in the Indian Air Force.

The Pathan from the North-West Frontier Province is always a Moslem (although not always a good Moslem) and more closely resembles the European than any other Indian. Many have strongly marked Semitic features, and at least one tribe (the Yusufzais) claim to be descended from the Jews of the Dispersion. They are a tall, strong, adventure-loving people, with a keen sense of humour, good intelligence, and great loyalty to individuals rather than to causes.

Their defects as soldiers are that their tribal customs are so democratic that they can be disciplined only by a leader they know; they tend to lose cohesion if their officers become casualties. I am sure, however, that they are destined to play a large part in the future of India (I had almost written "their country," but in truth they look upon most Indians as foreigners) for they have considerable powers of leadership, as well as quick wits. When these people exchange their marauding habits for the arts of commerce they may well become the Scots of India.

The Rajput is, of course, a Hindu, of the next highest caste to a Brahmin,<sup>1</sup> with a military tradition dating back to the dawn of history. A revealing story is told of four young Rajputs, in the last World War, who were found sleeping at their posts. Although no disaster had occurred through their negligence, the commanding officer had decided to try them by summary court-martial, when his Indian officers asked to be allowed to deal with the case themselves. Knowing his Rajputs, he consented. The four men were summoned before a meeting of their caste brethren, and tapped on the head with a slipper. That was all, but now they were outcastes, unable to associate with their fellows. Had they gone back to their villages, their wives and

<sup>1</sup> Brahmins from the United Provinces are again volunteering, as they did in pre-Mutiny days, and in spite of their exalted social status—or because of it?—they make little or no difficulty in mixing with other soldiers.

families would have scorned them. Their only hope in life, since that fatal tap, was to redeem their disgrace by death or glory.

For a year the battalion saw no active service; but eventually, in Mesopotamia, three were killed in battle, while the fourth was recommended for immediate promotion and the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

Such things still happen, though we rarely hear of them. Caste does cause difficulties in a modern army, but we should never forget that the Hindu system is based on realities; the thoroughbred is a good horse, and the Rajput is a good soldier for reasons that have been tested and proved through centuries.

Mention should be made of the Dogras and Garhwalis, two branches of Rajput stock—separated in remote ages—who have won great fame.

The Dogras are a charming people, equable in temperament, tidy, industrious, smart, and of unflinching courage. It was a Dogra Jemadar, Kapur Singh, who held a trench in the first battle of Ypres until all his comrades were killed, and then shot himself rather than surrender.

The Garhwalis have racial affinities with their neighbours, the Gurkhas, as well as with the Aryan race. They rose to fame as a military people in the last war, when a battalion of them at Neuve Chapelle, on March 10th, 1915, lost all its officers, but continued to advance in the most dauntless manner. Many were the deeds of gallantry performed by this tough hill people. They are now enlisted in considerable numbers, and have earned many decorations in this war.

The Mahrattas from the Western Ghats are a "master-race," who once ruled half India. Their appearance—unless one sees them stripped, and notes their depth of chest—gives little indication of their great strength and powers of endurance. Sturdy, self-reliant, and democratic, they are not over-burdened with Hindu caste prejudices, and are magnificent fighting men, as they have proved since the days of their national hero Sivaji (1627-80).

Tough, gay, self-reliant, the Mahratta is especially popular with British soldiers. The record of these fine little men during this war should be better known than it is: they have fought on every front, winning high renown everywhere.

I have written in another book of the Indian Military Academy and the Doon School for Boys at Dehra Dun. On this tour I spent an hour or two at the Royal Indian Military College, also at Dehra Dun. These institutions, together with H.M.I.S. *Feroze* in Bombay, are educating English and Indian boys together during their most formative years, and friendships are growing up which will lead to a far more intimate understanding between the two countries than was ever before possible.

Here I would mention another type of school: the group of three known as the King George's Royal Indian Military Schools, founded by King George V for the sons of officers and other ranks of the Indian Army. They are not officer-training centres (though many future officers do pass through them), but aim at producing men of character, military leaders.

Travelling north I shared a coupé with an Indian subaltern. When we were approaching Jhelum he kept staring out of the window. "That's it!" he exclaimed at last, when we passed the lawns and trees of King George's Royal Indian Military School. "That's my old school, where I passed the five best years of my life."

The Jhelum School educates about 400 boys and has a long waiting list. There are also waiting lists at similar schools at Jullundur, with about 300 boys, and at Ajmer, with about 200. Jhelum takes all Moslems; Jullundur, Sikhs and Dogras; Ajmer, Jats and Mahrattas.

Boys come at the age of thirteen, and leave at about eighteen. Fees are Rs. 65 a year (£5), but the cost of a boy's education is now Rs. 1300 a year (£100). All except the small fee is paid by the K.G.R.I.M.S. Fund, which was founded by King George V. for the sons of officers and other ranks of the Indian Army.

The majority of the staff is Indian. Discipline is maintained on English public school lines; and the administration is in the hands of the boys themselves, except for the general supervision of the British Commandant. The latter sent for the Boy Commandant, Huq Nawaz Kayani, and I went round the school with him.

First I inspected the prefects, drawn up in line, standing like carven stone, belts and boots like mirrors in the noonday sun; then the four houses where the boys live, which were as bright

as new pins. I never know what to say on such occasions, but it was certainly a smart school, running smoothly under its Indian prefects, commanded by Huq Nawaz Kayani. Of course, in the background stood the British Commandant, exercising much influence, I do not doubt. But Huq Nawaz was not only a charming lad, but a natural leader.

These boys may become the keystones of many an arch of progress. *Will* become keystones, provided they marry the right sort of girl. But will they? A similar chain of schools for girls is badly needed.

\* \* \*

Everything shone in the Gurkha Training Centre which I visited, from the bell at the Quarter Guard to the faces of the recruits. Every man at this centre wears a clean bush-shirt and a newly pressed pair of shorts every day. Twelve thousand pieces of laundry are washed every twenty-four hours, chiefly by the recruits themselves. Never have I seen so much "spit and polish"; and the results are magnificent. Nothing can entirely replace the barrack square. Those rows of stocky, slant-eyed, immaculate, inscrutable children, wide hats steeply tilted, drilling like last-term Sandhurst cadets, were a memorable sight.

The Gurkha is a peasant or shepherd from the mountains of Nepal, an independent Hindu kingdom of 5,500,000 inhabitants in the Eastern Himalayas.

Twenty battalions of Gurkhas are recruited for the Indian Army in peace-time, and this number has been doubled during the war.

The Ruler of Nepal does not exercise any executive power, this being vested in the Prime Minister, who is also Supreme Commander of the Nepalese Army. There is a Nepalese Minister in London, and a Nepalese Consul-General in Delhi; the British Minister at Khatmandu is chosen from the External Affairs Department of the Government of India.

Although the ruling classes of Nepal are highly orthodox Hindus, the Gurkhas enlisted in the Indian Army have few caste prejudices, and will eat most kinds of meat except female goats and sheep.

For eighty-seven years the Kingdom of Nepal has been a staunch friend of the British Empire, and its soldiers have been in the forefront of all the campaigns waged from India. Only

one condition is made as to their service: that they should be commanded only by British officers or their own Gurkha officers. Never had a country braver or more faithful friends than the stubborn and indomitable hillmen.

\* \* \*

At one Training Centre I visited, when I was following the Viceroy, who was inspecting the troops, an old man on a donkey suddenly threw off his blanket and became an infiltrating Japanese. The bomb he threw was a Hindu marriage firework, but it caused my heart to miss several beats. In cold print this may seem rather small beer, but such incidents are useful—almost indispensable—in training Indian troops.

The Indian boy reacts quickly to drama, and is generally a natural actor, with a keen sense of humour. "The recruit is *never* the fool we sometimes think he is," one Commandant told me. "Since he was a baby he has been minding cattle, and since he was ten he has been watching the weather and the crops, and looking out for thieves lurking near his village. Generally he has been helping to plough, or looking after carts, or horses, or camels. Supposing your car had broken down at a river crossing, would you be able to harness a team of bullocks to it and pull it out? I doubt it. But an Indian child would know what to do. He knows a lot more about some things than the average English boy. And the sky's the limit to what he can learn, provided you teach him the right way."

I agreed, remembering how often I have heard him taught the wrong way. In tactical schemes tiresome Eastland is no longer at war with Westland (conditions remote from a peasant's mind), but a gang of thieves has raided a money-lender's shop and abducted his daughter and his money. The *dacoits* have escaped up a dry watercourse. How would the students intercept them? What orders would they give their scouts? How would the main body march?

\* \* \*

Recruits must be toughened as well as trained. Battle inoculation seems much more exciting on a cold, clear morning in Upper India than it does on a rainy day at Aldershot. And I think it is more exciting.

Men are crawling along a trench while bullets zip over their

heads. The clearance is eighteen inches. Now they crouch into a shelter (it is a stillness test) while a Bren gun spits at them, and marriage bombs explode between their feet.

Now a dummy is pulled along a rail, and the men see it riddled by machine-gun fire. Then they go across the rail. (The machine-gun has been elevated meanwhile.) It is a test of nerve, walking this narrow rail, with a drop beneath, under a hail of bullets.

Now there is a rope ladder, a ten-foot wall, slippery tree-trunks . . . I need not enumerate the obstacles in an assault course. Only one of them is new.

There is a deep, dark, underground passage where the student endures darkness, smoke, and abuse. Yes, abuse. The recruit comes from a country where insults are paid for in blood. He must learn to adapt himself to the manners of city people, lest the enemy should prey on his feelings; so a sergeant swears at him through a speaking-tube. It is all part of the toughening process, and greatly amuses the spectators.

The work being done at these training centres is magnificent. Few people realise the strain of getting the best out of recruits in the months of intense heat, and the difficulty of maintaining keenness through the enervating months of the monsoon.

In war-time, with large numbers to control and officers who are naturally keen to go on active service, the task is doubly difficult and often thankless, yet unless it is well done no army can build up its reserves or win wars. The whole free world owes a debt to these trainers of Indian youth; they are artificers of victory as much as their comrades in the front line, and theirs is the harder task.

Today the Indian Army is by far the most imaginative, practical, and forward-looking educational force in India; it would be impossible to exaggerate its importance in this respect.

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Boys' battalions, for fifteen- or sixteen-year-olds, have become very popular throughout India. The boys receive Rs. 10 a month (about 15s.), in addition to the usual military rations, and extra milk when the doctor thinks they require it, which they usually do. With plentiful Army food the boys soon fill out, and by the time they reach enlistment age they are



stronger and taller than men who come straight from the villages.

Brains are filled as well as bodies, and filled with sensible stuff useful in after-life. When a boy is passed to the training centre he is generally up to the standard of a non-commissioned officer, and need only undergo a two months' course before being drafted to his battalion or to a training division. Benefits are mutual as between boy and State. The former improves morally, mentally and physically, while the Army gets a good potential soldier at small cost.

One night at Jhelum, after dinner, following an inspection by the Commander-in-Chief, the officers of the centre attended a boys' boxing tournament, where teams had come from the 1st Punjab Regiment, the 12th Frontier Force Regiment, the 16th Punjab Regiment, and King George's Royal Indian Military School.

There were fourteen fights, and the last round did not end until one o'clock in the morning. There is no doubt whatever that boxing has come to stay in the Punjab. It has not yet displaced wrestling among the older men, but amongst the younger generation it is becoming as popular as cricket or hockey. The behaviour of the audience amused me; it was inclined to be noisy, just like a crowd at home, and was sternly reprovved by the referee, not always with success, when a fight became unbearably exciting.

In my day it was thought that boxing was far too dangerous for Indian boys. Wise old gentlemen said it might rupture their spleens; and anyway that a Hindu couldn't possibly fight a Moslem without all sorts of dangerous consequences. Well, spleens remain undamaged, and the rival religions hit each other just as hard as if they were Christians, with no bad results. In fact, with excellent results.

One of the best contests was between the amber-eyed Boy Havildar Major of the 1st Punjabi Regiment, by name Bela Singh, and a Moslem prefect from King George's School. Bela Singh was rather hampered by the fact that he had been asked to tea with Sir Claude and Lady Auchinleck that very afternoon, and had eaten an enormous number of cakes. At one time he was knocked silly, and it looked as if he would be down for the count, but he rallied, with typical Sikh courage, and won on points.

Sikh boys, with their long hair gathered into a top-knot, are sometimes inclined to look rather like girls, though there is nothing in the least effeminate in their behaviour. Whereby hangs a story.

A certain colonel at a lonely station up-country, not a hundred miles from Jhelum, gave a party for some recently arrived R.A.F. officers, American and British. There was the usual shortage of dancing partners, so he dressed up some of the Sikh recruits of his battalion in fascinating *saris*, and said that they belonged to the harem of a local maharajah, who had kindly permitted his wives to grace the occasion. In the small hours of the morning, when the airmen had become soppy over these agile and enigmatic young ladies, he announced a new feature in the programme. "We'll show you the emancipation of Indian womanhood! Out of purdah and into the ring!"

\* \* \*

When the show was over General Auchinleck spoke to the men in Urdu. He was cheered and cheered again. Never since the days of Lord Birdwood—and before him Lord Roberts—has a chief been so beloved by Indian soldiers.

The 1st Punjabi Regiment were the victors. Bela Singh came to the platform to receive a green embroidered banner. He had a cut lip, and his cat's eyes were swollen, but he stood there imperturbable, trying to remember what he had to say. He had it almost right. "Three cheers," he cried, "for His Elocution the Commander-in-Chief!"

\* \* \*

Someone really ought to describe the vast organisations in Imperial Delhi which are planning the downfall of the Japanese: Army Headquarters, the Supply Department of the Government of India, and the liaison staff of South-East Asia Command. But not I. Those intricate offices and all these babus and brigadiers leave me feeling paralysed, as if I were viewing the mind-defeating mass of carvings of some South Indian temple, or as a fly must feel in treacle.

There is one department of Army Headquarters, however, which I cannot leave unmentioned—the Selection of Personnel Branch.

It was established in 1943, on the model of the War Office

Selection Board, instituted the previous year, and it has already tested 9,000 candidates for commissions. In the United Kingdom 60,000 candidates have been tested.

At first commanding officers were sceptical of the results and inclined to question the validity of the intelligence tests, and even the importance of intelligence in an officer, if it could be measured. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, however, their opinions changed after they had seen a Selection Board at work.

A typical Selection Board in India consists of a President and his Deputy (both senior officers), four Group Testing Officers, two Civilian Testing Officers, a psychologist who gives the candidates certain tests, and a psychiatrist who examines those candidates who are considered by the psychologist to need further exploration of their mental make-up. Forty candidates attend, and the tests last three days.

When the candidates first assemble they are told they are *not to be examined in the ordinary way, but are to be tested to discover whether they possess the special qualities of an officer, and that it is as much in their interest as it is in that of the Army that they should be chosen only for a position in which they can succeed.*

They are now divided into groups of not more than ten, and the Group Testing Officers take each group out of doors and set the candidates some task to accomplish together, such as to cross a stream by means of a few planks and a rope. The tasks are varied and cannot be fully described. They are all designed to reveal how far each candidate can adapt himself to a given situation, and whether or not he is a resourceful and determined person.

In addition to group tests, there are individual tests for clarity of thought and ability to carry out instructions. I happened to see a candidate for a commission in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (India) so tested, but similar methods are applied to men. She was shown a table heaped with brass buttons, and told to call two other candidates, explaining to them clearly how to sort the buttons. Having given her orders, she was to say nothing else until the job was done. I saw several women confronted with this problem. The failures merely glanced at the table, called two girls, and said: "Sort those buttons." The successes, having first examined what they

had to do, said something to this effect: "These buttons are stamped with various designs, such as a crown and anchor, crossed swords, and so on. Each of you take half the pile. I want you to put the crown and anchors here, and the crossed swords there, and so on, as quickly as possible, until all the buttons are sorted."

After the Group Testing Officers have formed their opinion on the character of each individual, the candidates go to the psychologist, who grades them according to their mental powers. Here considerable accuracy is achieved, for mental capacity (technically "G loading") is definitely measurable. Tests for officers are in English, which is, of course, essential to a candidate for a commission; but methods have also been devised by which the aptitude or intelligence of entirely illiterate persons can be accurately assessed. Here are two of them:

"Form Board" consists of jigsaw puzzles, simple at first, and growing progressively more difficult. Candidates find before them a set of ten square trays and ten heaps of plywood shapes. The examiner demonstrates what is to be done—namely, the fitting of the pieces into the tray. He then makes two of the candidates do the first puzzle while the others watch. Finally he sets the candidates to the task of filling in the other nine trays in a given time, and marks them according to the pieces they have correctly assembled.

"Object Assembly" consists of objects (instead of designs, as in the previous test) which are to be assembled from their component pieces. The examiner demonstrates how four pieces of plywood are assembled to form a bottle or a horse. When satisfied that the idea is understood, he sets the candidates to assemble objects of six, seven or eight pieces. They are all things or animals with which the peasant is familiar, such as a cart or a cow or a hand.

Such methods sound almost childishly easy, but they are not as simple as they seem: every detail of the demonstration method, also of the timing and of the marking, had to be worked out over thousands of experiments, and the results obtained had to be compared with carefully ascertained "normal performances." In operation these tests have proved their validity beyond question.

For instance, an officer at a Gurkha training centre had

graded a hundred of his recruits according to their ability, as estimated by him after seeing them at work for nine months; officers of the Selection Board visited the centre and tested these boys in the course of *one day*; their results were almost identical with the estimates made by the man who had trained them. Again, a battalion which had been for three years in operational areas was tested without the testers knowing the rank of the men they were examining. Their verdict can be best shown by the following table, which gives the percentage of various ranks, classified in six grades :

	<i>Exceptionally Good.</i>	<i>Well Above Average.</i>	<i>Above Average.</i>	<i>Below Average.</i>	<i>Well Below Average.</i>	<i>Very Poor.</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Indian Officers ...	47	33	20	—	—	—
Senior N.C.O.s ...	39	39	17	5	—	—
Junior N.C.O.s ...	18	32	25	16	7	2
Sepoys ...	7	19	19	24	23	8

It will be seen from the above that there was a very close correspondence between the test results and the rank held by the men in their unit. Nor is this an isolated case. All sorts and conditions of soldiers have been assessed by these methods, and the results have shown that illiterates, like the educated, can be scientifically selected for the jobs they are best fitted to do.

To return to the officer candidates. After the mental tests of the psychologist they may go to the psychiatrist, but only if the Group Testing Officer or the psychologist considers they are not normal in their behaviour. The psychiatrist interviews them, and has various methods of testing their flexibility of mind and ability to deduce relationships, by methods too technical to be described here.

Now the Civilian Testing Officers talk to each candidate separately, and from their knowledge of the part of the country from which he comes, and his replies to questions regarding his work, family and ambitions, they form a general estimate of his suitability.

Finally, on the morning of the third day, each candidate appears alone before the full Board.

The Board sits at desks facing the President, who is at a separate table with his deputy. He calls "Number One!" and the first candidate appears, with a large numeral pinned to his

chest and back. Except to the Civilian Testing Officers his name has been unknown to those who have been judging his capacities.

The President rises and shakes hands with the candidate, wishes him a pleasant journey, and tells him that he will hear the decision of the Board in due course.

That is all. The candidate withdraws, and a brief discussion follows: his appearance has been chiefly for the purpose of refreshing the memories of the Board.

After the candidate has withdrawn, the first to speak is the Group Testing Officer, who reads out the candidate's grading, a letter of the alphabet indicating his estimate of the man's character, initiative and powers of decision. The psychologist then grades him as of the mental standard "A," "B," "C," etc., and the Civilian Officers give their opinion.

In a surprising number of cases there is agreement between all members of the Board, but it is when opinions diverge that the case becomes interesting. I saw several men who looked to me just the right type. Sometimes the G.T.O. would consider that he lacked confidence, while the psychologist rated his intelligence as good. The psychiatrist generally gave his opinion in such cases, saying that the man seemed unstable, but that he might improve with responsibility, or that he was too rigid and egocentric to make a leader. Sometimes, again, the G.T.O. would recommend a man whom the psychologist declared was below normal intelligence. In all cases the decision of the President is final.

Many great commercial firms now employ similar tests, adapted to their special requirements. Rowntrees, for instance, choose employees by these methods, and the girls so selected are in fact more skilful than casual labour in packing assorted chocolates, for which nimble fingers and quick eyes are wanted.

The results of scientific selection may be far-reaching, everywhere, in every walk of life. Hereafter it may be possible to ensure that the best men hold the best positions in politics, and that nothing goes by favour, even kissing. Future lovers may consider "G loading" more important than glamour, which no doubt it is.

With this vision of Utopia we must leave the fighting men of modern India, in order to enquire into their ancestry.

## POSTSCRIPT ON BENGAL

Although famine relief work cannot be described as training, it did, in fact, provide the Indian Army with valuable experience.

In the autumn of 1943 about 12,000,000 people in Bengal were suffering from the effects of famine. Not all were actually starving, but there was widespread disease, despondency and malnutrition. The new Viceroy acted promptly, sending twelve battalions into the affected districts.

At first the Bengalis were suspicious, remembering the days when troops were billeted on villages as a punishment; but as soon as they saw that the Army could command transport, send signals, produce food and clothing, and was ready to do these things quickly, a sigh of relief went up from a people on the verge of despair. Women who had not dared to seek assistance, because they were naked, now found energy to collect some rags, and came to the Army camps. The old, the sick, the hungry and hopeless, and the orphans began to flock in. Sixteen Army hospitals were established, with 2,150 beds and 61 mobile treatment centres. Teams of Punjabi volunteers toured the country, teaching rice-eaters that wheat was also good food, when properly cooked. Other teams did all sorts of jobs outside their military duties, such as unloading railway trucks, nursing sick children, and inoculating people at places where doctors were not available. In rural Bengal there is only one doctor to 30,000 people, yet nine million people were inoculated for cholera or smallpox in six months. Unless the Army had helped it could not have been done.

Some 700 boats belonging to the villagers, which had been sunk by the Army in 1942, when it was necessary to deny every means of communication to the Japanese, were salvaged by the Royal Engineers and returned to their owners. By now another 4,000 boats will have been repaired and returned. Red Cross dried milk entered the deficit districts at the rate of 168 tons a month, and up to the end of last year 400 tons of blankets had been distributed. Two cavalry officers (Captain Annesley-Cooke and Captain Drew-Smyth) founded an orphans' home at their own expense: it was amazing to see how quickly these little waifs and strays became happy, normal children.

All this was only part of a huge task. The Army at one time

was feeding 50,000 people a day; whereas the civil administration had to look after millions. Nevertheless, it is beyond question that Lord Wavell's decision to employ the Indian Army saved many lives and brought new heart and hope to Bengal.

On its side the Army certainly did not waste its time, even from a military standpoint. Junior leaders developed their powers of command and initiative, administrative staffs learned much about the quick movement of stores and hospital supplies, and all ranks benefited from their adventure in constructive citizenship.

What might not be done in India if her fighting men, after their immediate tasks had been accomplished, were switched to the battle for the regeneration of the countryside?

I do not suggest that it would be possible or even desirable to keep two million men as teachers, but I do think a new approach to the problems of reconstruction is feasible. I would say to the Government of India: "Your schemes look well on paper, but they will never be put into practice unless you can find leaders. Where will you find them, if not in the men returned from overseas? Forget the financiers and lawyers and the toadies who haunt your Ministries in Delhi. Support the fighting peasant with better cattle, better seed, more credit; he is the hope of the future and the salt of the Indian earth."



### III

#### *A Glance at the Past*

**I**NDIAN soldiers did not arise, like Lakshmi, from the foam of the Indian Ocean. They emerged from the conflicts of history, and if you would know them you must know something of how they came to be organised, from the seventeenth century onwards, by the British merchants in India.

Technically—although not in spirit—the Indian Army can be traced back to the native retainers of the East India Company, who guarded its merchandise, and sometimes (but not always) increased the prestige of its officials. But its real ancestors are the sepoys of South India who fought under Clive and Wellesley, and the races who were once masters of Hindustan, and who afterwards served in the British ranks as volunteers.

In the long history of India, Rajputs, Pathans, Moghuls, Sikhs and Mahrattas have been in turn conquerors; they fought each other, and they fought the British. When the latter eventually prevailed, it was not long before mutual respect was established. The fiercer the fighting, the warmer the subsequent friendship.

In the campaigns of 1845 and 1849, for instance, the British met the Sikhs in six desperate encounters, winning only the last outright, and suffering in others losses greater than their arms sustained in the Napoleonic wars; yet only eight years later, in 1857, the two peoples were fighting side by side; and the valour of the Sikhs has since been proved in a hundred conflicts from Poperinghe to Peking, and from the Halfaya to the Ngakyedauk Passes. So it has been with the other races, and also with the Gurkhas, the citizens of an independent kingdom, serving in the armies of the British Empire by arrangement with the Government of Nepal.

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“The Company of the Merchants of London trading with the East Indies” was established at Surat, near Bombay, in

1613, under a charter from Queen Elizabeth. Other trading posts were set up and fortified in Bengal in 1634 and at Madras in 1640.

On March 27th, 1668, when King Charles II sold the Island of Bombay for £10 to the East India Company (a burdensome charge to a King with so many mistresses to support, and one which yielded little revenue) the garrison consisted of 5 officers, 139 other ranks, and 54 topasses, or Portuguese half-castes. This nucleus of an Indian Army was increased in 1683 by two companies of Rajputs, each 100 strong, commanded by Rajput officers. For many years thereafter the English (the British, after the Act of Union of 1707) were well content with such small forces. Similar or smaller garrisons were maintained at Fort St. George in Madras and at Fort William in Calcutta. The Company of the Merchants of London was in fact a company of London merchants, neither more nor less, looking for trade, not territory.

It is a strange story, how the managers of a commercial concern became the organisers of enormous conquests, a tale of high loyalties, dire treacheries, the scheming of elderly Brahmins, and the courage of hot-blooded youth, told here only in outline, to serve as a background for the achievements of the Indian Army.

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Under the Moghul Emperor Akbar the Great (1556-1605) there had been comparative stability and security in India, but after his death the corruption of government officials increased rapidly. During the reign of his successor, Jehangir (1605-1627) the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, was constantly complaining of the vexations and indignities to which his countrymen were subjected. The next Emperor, Shahjehan the Magnificent (1627-1707), was so absorbed in great architectural schemes that he allowed the civil administration to sink into yet deeper confusion, and merchandise could travel the roads only under armed escort. His son Aurungzeb (1658-1707) was born unlucky, and a bigot. Civil war added to the general unrest, and when he was called to his fathers, in 1707, it was evident that there could be no trade in India without troops, and that the successor to the Moghul Empire might be any group or nation with command of disciplined soldiers and the means to pay them regularly.

A British regiment (the 39th Foot, now the 1st Dorsets) arrived in Madras in 1754, and for more than a century afterwards (until the Sepoy Mutiny) the Indian Army was divided into the King's troops, the Honourable East India Company's European troops, and the H.E.I.C.'s Indian troops.

Few European soldiers were available, however, for the storm-clouds of the Seven Years' War were gathering over Vienna, St. Petersburg, Paris and London. Could Indians be trained on European lines? That was the question that exercised the mind of every soldier of fortune who travelled east. In those days the Moghul armies had lost the cohesion and valour of their ancestors under Tamerlane and Baber: they now resembled moving bazaars, with a train of camp followers—sutlers, grooms, tent-pitchers, pipe-lighters, camel-men, courtesans, catamites, and the general's harem—a straggling host sometimes outnumbering the combatants by ten to one. Only the Mahrattas, then a rising power, were trained to speed and obedience: they slept on the ground, with their horses' reins about their wrists. India did not lack fighting men, but she lacked leaders who were capable of enforcing discipline and inspiring confidence.

The most successful of such leaders was Robert Clive, an impecunious young factor in the Company's service, who brilliantly defended Arcot, near Trichinopoly, in the summer of 1751. He it was who first formed regular battalions of Indian soldiers. (A few Frenchmen had dabbled in the same methods, as had the swarthy and sinister Sombre, a German, but without question Clive was the precursor of the freelances who afterwards swayed the destinies of the peninsula.) The composition of the first battalion he organised, nicknamed the *Lal Pultan*, or the Redcoats, was as follows: *British ranks*: A captain, two subalterns, a sergeant-major and several sergeants. This was an advisory staff, somewhat similar to the advisers now attached to Indian State Forces, to help in training, not to command in the field. *Indian ranks*: A commandant, an adjutant, 10 subedars, 30 jemadars, 50 havildars, 40 naiks, 10 buglers, 700 sepoy.

At the epoch-making victory of Plassey (June 23rd, 1757) Clive's small force, outnumbered by 15 to 1, withstood the onslaught of the Nawab of Bengal's immense army. The British strength was 2,100 sepoy, 800 Europeans, 100 half-castes, and 10 small cannon; the Nawab had 50,000 infantry soldiers (also, in theory, 18,000 cavalry, but they were faithless, and hovered

on the flanks of the battle, watching for the moment to join the winning side) and 50 guns, manned chiefly by Frenchmen, who remained staunch to the Nawab to the last. Clive's infantry repulsed a heavy attack without wavering. His guns had kept their powder dry, while those of the Nawab were rendered useless by a rainstorm. The vast array confronting him was thrown into panic, as when a tiger leaps amidst grazing deer.

The lesson was plain. Indian troops could hold their own, even against tremendous odds, when led by officers they trusted. Today the fact seems self-evident, but it was not so before 1757.

Every Power in India noted Clive's success; the French in the Carnatic, the Mahrattas in the west, the Sikhs in the north. Even the languid Moghul Court in Delhi, in the intervals of hashish-smoking and philosophical speculation, dreamed of the days when it held the sceptre of Hindustan, and wondered whether it might not be grasped again.

There were, of course, many imitators of Clive. The most distinguished was Benoit de Boigne, the son of a hide merchant at Chambéry, in Savoy, who landed in Madras in 1778. For a short period he served as an ensign under "John Company," but soon he travelled north, and took service with Mahadji Scindia, the ancestor of the present Maharajah of Gwalior, who was then the agent of the Mahrattas in Delhi, Agra and Ujjain.

Early in 1787 de Boigne was in command of two recently raised battalions of infantry at the battle of Lalsot (to the south-east of Jaipur). Ten thousand veteran Rajput Lancers charged his inexperienced troops, but de Boigne's training saved the day. Forming a hollow square, with guns in the centre, he awaited the famous Hindu squadrons, whose onslaught no infantry had yet withstood. At a word of command de Boigne's front rank fell back, opening the guns, which brought down the leading horsemen with a volley of grape-shot; then his musketeers poured volley after volley into the disordered ranks of the Rajput chivalry.

A brilliant career began for this young Savoyard, who had rightly estimated the value of fire-power in war, and in 1790 we find him flying the Red Cross of Savoy from his headquarters at Agra, where he had an arsenal, an artillery park, a division of 10,000 troops, and for their maintenance the revenue of a rich tract of country yielding £200,000 a year.

Like Clive forty years previously, de Boigne was planning an

army that would eventually take Delhi. He spared no effort to give his troops the best talent available as leaders. Each battalion was commanded if possible by two Europeans, paid £600 and £300 a year respectively. Brigade commanders (also Europeans) received from £2,000 to £1,000 a year. Indian ranks consisted of an adjutant (£52 p.a.), 8 platoon commanders (£30 p.a.), 32 sergeants (£16 p.a.), 32 corporals (£13 p.a.), 24 bandsmen (£18 p.a.) and 416 privates (£8 p.a.). Civilian personnel consisted of a paymaster (£90 p.a.), 2 clerks (£30 p.a.) and 6 timekeepers and messengers (£8 p.a.).

Out of the revenue of the estate allotted to him for his force (known as a *jaidad*) de Boigne not only provided all the arms, uniform and equipment for his army, but maintained also a well-found artillery and a small body of irregular cavalry. This force won an unbroken succession of victories while he commanded it, and was therefore cheap at the price of the *jaidad*. How much de Boigne made for himself is not known, but Mahadji Scindia paid him £7,500 a year.

Presently the Rajput Princes revolted against the Mahrattas, and de Boigne was sent to attack them. He came upon the enemy near the village of Patan (sixty miles north-west of Ahmedabad) on June 20th, 1790. Against his 10,000 men were ranged 30,000 laboriously entrenched infantry, 25,000 well-mounted cavalry, and 129 guns with ample supplies of chain-shot, ball and grape.

Finding that the enemy would not leave their positions to attack, he advanced to within close artillery range. His losses in gunners were heavy, and evening was drawing in without his having come to grips with the Rajputs. Had he then retired he might well have been overwhelmed by the masses awaiting an opportunity to strike. Instead, he ordered a general advance and stormed the position, supported by the fire of covering platoons in the best modern manner. "Upon which the enemy," he writes,<sup>1</sup> "not relishing at all the close fighting, gave way on all sides, infantry as well as cavalry, leaving us in possession of all their guns, baggage, bazaar, elephants, and everything else.

"Our success is astonishing! A complete victory gained by a handful of men over such a number in such a position! It may surprise you when I say that in less than three hours' time

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to the *Calcutta Gazette* of July 22nd, 1790, quoted in *European Military Adventures of Hindustan*, by Herbert Compton.

12,000 round-shot and 1,500 grape-shot were fired by us, and by the enemy much more, as they had two guns to our one. During all the engagement I was on horseback, encouraging my men. Thank God I have realised all the sanguine expectations of Scindia."

He certainly had: he had taken 12,000 prisoners, 107 pieces of artillery, 6,000 stand of arms, 252 colours, 15 elephants, 200 camels, 2,513 horses; and more than 3,000 oxen from the unfortunate villagers of Patan.

A few months later (September 10th) he repeated the same tactics further north, with even greater success, defeating 100,000 Rajputs and allied troops at Merta. "The pillage lasted three days," wrote an officer to a Calcutta paper. "To mention all the particulars would make your teeth water. The ladies at first seemed displeased at our coming so abruptly into the town, but at length grew more kind, acknowledging with good grace that none but the brave deserve the fair."

Mahadji Scindia was now securely in power, and so was de Boigne. The two trusted each other, and neither abused his position. Both of them, moreover, kept on good terms with the British. So matters might have continued, to the great benefit of Hindustan; but in 1793 Mahadji died, and his successor was a youth of fifteen. Although de Boigne remained loyal to Daulat Rao Scindia, he must have soon perceived that his days in India were numbered, backed by a mere child, and surrounded by ambitious generals.

Two years later he resigned. It was no empty excuse that his health had broken. He had lived in India continuously for seventeen years, and had worked without a break in a climate and under conditions that might have frayed the stoutest nerves.

In 1792 he had married in Delhi the daughter of a Persian colonel in his private bodyguard of cavalry. What happened to the lady is not known, but he brought his son and daughter by her to Europe, together with a fortune of £400,000. His son, Ali Buksh, was baptised as Charles Alexander, and his daughter, Bannu, became a Christian under the name of Anna. She died in 1810: Charles Alexander married into the French nobility, and his descendants are still living.

"One who knew de Boigne well," says Herbert Compton, "has thus described his appearance two years before his death.

His frame and stature were Herculean, and he was full 6 feet 2 inches in height, preserving at an advanced age all the gallantry and politeness of the *vieille cour*. He disliked, from modesty, to advert to his past deeds, and so seemed to strangers to have lost his memory; but in the society of those who could partake of the emotions it awakened the name of Merta always stirred in him associations he could not resist. The blood would mount to his temples, and the old fire came into his eyes, as he recalled, with inconceivable rapidity and eloquence, the story of that glorious day. Yet he spoke of himself as if it were of another, and always concluded with the words 'My past appears as a dream!'

"But it was no dream, that glorious past of his. The vista of many years stretched between him and his deeds, but through its gathering shadows, vivid, distinct and brilliant, glittered the star of victory."

He died peacefully in his bed, in his eightieth year, on June 21st, 1830, having distributed more than £500,000 in benefactions to his birthplace.

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Out of many other remarkable characters who have joined East and West in the comradeship of arms only two can be mentioned here.

The Begum Sumroo, as she came to be known, was a Delhi dancing-girl who married the above-mentioned Sombre, or Sumroo, a German adventurer in the service of the Delhi Emperor, somewhere about 1764. When he died in 1778 she took over command of his troops and became a Christian.

At one time she had 200 Europeans serving in her forces, which consisted of some 2,000 cavalry, 2,000 infantry and 40 pieces of artillery. They were a mutinous crew when she first became their leader, and had been accustomed, when their pay was in arrears, to take off Sumroo's trousers and straddle him across a gun until their demands were satisfied: a gun almost red-hot in the blaze of the Indian sun. No one thought of taking such liberties with the Begum until Cupid, or his Indian counterpart, Kama, disturbed an equanimity which she had never lost in the face of the enemy.

It was a handsome young Frenchman in her service who brought her to the edge of ruin. She admired his polished

manners and his reminiscences of Versailles, which were in marked contrast to the behaviour and conversation of her other commanders, who were mostly drunken and illiterate. Nevertheless, these bravos were leaders of men, whereas Le Vaisseau, the fascinating Frenchman, seems to have been something of a fop. (Yet brave, as events proved.)

The Begum was a clever woman, and quickly realised that her position was becoming unstable, for she invested large sums of money in the Company's bonds and made arrangements to escape with her lover to British territory. She also made a suicide pact with him that they would never fall alive into the hands of the Sardhana officers.

They escaped on a moonless summer night, she in a palanquin, he on horseback, with a small group of armed retainers. Soon their absence was discovered and a squadron of cavalry galloped after them. The game was up. They were outnumbered, and all their male attendants deserted them. The Begum stabbed herself in the breast and fainted. Her women cried out that she was dead, whereupon Le Vaisseau put a pistol to his head and blew out his brains.

The Begum, however, was only slightly wounded. She was taken back to Sardhana and chained to a gun, although not in the undignified position of her husband.

Strange scenes followed, and intrigues too complicated to describe. The mutineers could not decide who was to be their leader, and eventually, since there was no one half so capable as the Begum, they reinstated her in command. The covenant they made at this time was witnessed by thirty Europeans, of whom only one could sign his name; some affixed their seals, while others scrawled any letters of the alphabet they happened to be able to form. It began: "In the name of God and His Majesty Christ"—for the scribe who prepared it (in Persian) was a Moslem, and therefore averse to joining other Gods with God.

In 1803, when the Mahrattas were defeated before Delhi, the Begum clearly perceived that the British were destined to be paramount in her part of the world, and hastened to make her peace. She was carried in her palanquin to Lord Luke's camp, where the General was sitting over a bumper of port, celebrating the good news of the Begum's submission. When she was announced he staggered out of the mess tent on her arrival



and kissed her on both cheeks. Her attendants were horrified, but the Begum, without batting an eyelash, explained that such salutations were customary amongst Christian people. After all, she was over fifty at the time. Once under British protection, she disbanded the major part of her army, keeping only a sufficient force to collect her revenues promptly; thereby she amassed great wealth.

Bishop Heber, who saw her when she was eighty, described her as "a very queer-looking old woman, with brilliant but wicked eyes, and the remains of beauty in her features." Her gifts to charity were large (including £15,000 to the Pope and £7,500 to the Archbishop of Canterbury), and she built a cathedral at Sardhana, where I have stood—and meditated somewhat on her story—before her marble tomb by Canova. When she died in 1836 she left £700,000, chiefly to her step-grandson, Dyce-Sombre, who married a daughter of Lord St. Vincent.

Lately I have stood also upon a mound in the village of Thomasgarh, some fifty miles north-west of Delhi. George Thomas was an Irish sailor turned freelance, and a passionate admirer of the Begum Sumroo. The mound was a bastion of his battlements, from which he ruled a considerable domain. Had he married the Begum, she might have weaned him from his fatal fondness for wine, and once again history might have changed its course, for he was a gallant, vivid personality, loved by the men he led. Nobody remembers him now in Thomasgarh, or in the adjacent hamlet of Georgegunj, for the days of his splendour and success were nearly 150 years ago.

In this very village, however, a somewhat didactic old villager, with beard "white as Mount Soracte, when winter nights are long," told me, amidst a circle of admiring children, how his ancestors had sheltered Metcalfe Sahib, escaping from the mutineers of Delhi in 1857. There is good reason why Metcalfe (whom we shall meet again in these pages) should be remembered, for two hundred acres of land have been given in perpetuity to the family who saved him. A few greybeards remain in these parts who keep alive the memory of the fierce and fateful summer of 1857. They repeat what their fathers have told them, and do not let their descendants forget the rewards which accrued to them for backing the right side.

As to the Begum, her story refutes the common belief in the

West that women in the East are chattels, or slaves of the harem. Women have always exercised a mighty influence in India, and not always only in the home, as witness the Rani of Jhansi, who died in battle against the British. It is true of India as well as Europe that over the shoulder of every successful man may be seen the face of the woman he loves, and it is a truth upon which hasty reformers would do well to ponder.

Colonel William Gardner, who raised a famous regiment of horse for the Indian Army, attributed his success in life to his marriage with a Moslem princess. "When I was a young man," he told Lady Fanny Parkes,<sup>1</sup> "I was entrusted to negotiate a treaty with one of the native princes of Cambay. Durbars and consultations were continually held. During one of the former, at which I was present, a curtain near me was gently pulled aside, and I saw the most beautiful black eyes in the world. It was impossible to think of the treaty: those piercing glances completely bewildered me."

The eyes belonged to the thirteen-year-old daughter of the Nawab. Gardner demanded her hand, and, although her relations were at first indignant, they consented when he agreed to marry her according to Moslem rites. "On the day of the wedding," said Gardner, "I raised the veil from the countenance of the bride, and in the mirror that was placed between us, according to Moslem custom, I beheld the bright eyes that had bewildered me. I smiled. The young Begum smiled too."

They lived together in great happiness for forty years. She bore him two sons and a daughter, and died in 1835, shortly after her husband's death, of a broken heart. Their descendant, Lord Gardner, married a princess of the House of Timur in 1879.

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From these bypaths of history we must return to the more prosaic record of the Indian Army as it was organised and administered after the battle of Plassey.

India of the mid-eighteenth century, as has been made abundantly clear, was an arena where soldiers struggled for dominion, with little thought for the people whose lands they ravaged. British merchants joined in the fray because they would otherwise have perished amongst the combatants. True,

<sup>1</sup> I quote again from *European Military Adventures of Hindustan*.

they were nothing loth. Many enjoyed fighting more than trade, and some gained fantastic wealth. Clive, for instance, returned with gold and jewels which made him the richest commoner in England. But these men did not enrich themselves at the expense of an innocent, pastoral people: they were carried along (gaily enough, no doubt) upon a floodtide of anarchy, in spite of their directors in London, who looked on war with deep dismay, not from any altruistic reasons, indeed, but because a rupee in the hand at their factories seemed to them so obviously worth much more than two in the blood-soaked plains of Upper India.

In every battle of those days Indian troops were in the majority over their British comrades. So it was notably in 1780, when a confederacy of nearly all the chief Princes of India combined against Warren Hastings, hoping to get rid of the British, as the British had ousted and usurped the Dutch and Portuguese possessions. Madras was in dire peril. Had it not been for Sir Eyre Coote's victory at Porto Novo (145 miles south of Madras) on July 1st, 1781, Hastings might have met a shattering defeat.

A defeat, we must note, whose consequences would have diverted the course of a great river of history, for had he lost at Porto Novo he would have been driven from office by his enemies in London, in collusion with his enemies in India; in which event the East India Company would have gone the way of its foreign rivals.

Coote's force consisted of 6,000 Indian and 2,000 British troops, with 41 guns. His opponent, the formidable Hyder Ali, whom Burke described as "a menacing meteor, compounding all the materials of fury, havoc and desolation into one black cloud," commanded 40,000 men and 100 guns.

"If a moment is to be named when the existence of British power depended on its native troops, we should fix on the battle of Porto Novo. Driven to the seashore, attacked by an enemy exulting in recent success, and strong in the terror of his name, every circumstance combined that could dishearten the small body of men on whom the fate of the war depended. But not a heart shrank from that trial."<sup>1</sup>

Coote's sepoy soldiers were staunch. They rallied to the pipes of the 73rd Highlanders, and with them marched forward to the rout

<sup>1</sup> Thus the eminent historian, Sir John Malcolm.

of an enemy five times their strength. It was a victory to be named with Plassey (1757), Wandiwash (1760), Buxar (1764) and the battles before Delhi in 1803 and 1857. These established British power in India for what was then the utmost horizon of living sight.

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To trace in detail the fortunes of the Indian Army from these turbulent times to the present day is impossible within the limits of a chapter. It must suffice to mention its major campaigns, and to glance at its varying organisation.

In 1796 there were only 57,000 Indian troops in the Company's pay, divided as follows: Bengal, 24,000; Madras, 24,000; Bombay, 9,000.

Between 1799 and 1857—during the last fifty-eight years of the Company's rule, which was the time of its chief annexations and its most decisive victories—the Indian Army extinguished French influence in Hyderabad, defeated Tipu Sultan in Mysore, took the Carnatic, entered Nepal, crushed the roving freelances known as the Pindaris in Central India, broke the strength of the Mahrattas, twice invaded Burma and Afghanistan, twice fought the Sikhs, fought also in Sind and Gwalior, and coerced and annexed various principalities, of which the Kingdom of Oudh was the chief.

Such a catalogue of conquest cannot but seem predatory and ruthless. Aggressive the British policy certainly was, and it must always remain a matter of opinion whether or not the pacification of India might have been achieved by milder means. The theory, at any rate, is open to doubt, whereas the fact that India achieved internal security is beyond dispute. We may ask ourselves, who live in stirring times, whether scheming dynasties and inveterate religious enmities could have been held in leash without armed force? Certainly the Indian people did not think so at the time. They welcomed a strong hand, which gave them security, administered through their own people.

Peace, imposed by the Indian Army. This point is sometimes forgotten, by Indians and British alike. The British never conquered India by themselves. Had they attempted to do so, they would have been defeated by native rulers in league. They conquered India by and with its inhabitants, and governed it by the same means. It is true that without British direction the

long arm of the law might not have been effective (it had failed during past centuries); nevertheless, the fact remains that the nerves as well as the muscles of the arm were largely Indian.

In the campaigns against the Mahrattas, for instance, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Peshwa might have remained on his throne in Poona but for the active support accorded to the British by the masses of western and southern India. Those humble people, regarded by the higher castes almost as the Nazis regard the Jews, fought magnificently when once they were given the means to do so.

In 1805, when the Presidency armies had been placed on a peace footing owing to a lull in the Mahratta struggle, their establishments were as follows :

		<i>Indians.</i>	<i>British.</i>	<i>Totals.</i>
Bengal	...	57,000	7,000	64,000
Madras	..	53,000	11,000	64,000
Bombay	...	20,000	6,500	26,500
Totals	...	130,000	24,500	154,000

Not for long did the country remain at peace. In spite of an economic stringency which made standing armies difficult to maintain, the Company's forces fought 28 battles and took 128 fortresses between 1813 and 1823.

At the beginning of the famous year of 1857, when the Mutiny broke out, the following were the Presidency establishments :

		<i>Indians.</i>	<i>British.</i>	<i>Totals.</i>
Bengal	...	137,571	21,432	159,003
Madras	...	49,252	8,708	57,960
Bombay	...	44,928	9,360	54,288
Local forces and police		79,287	—	79,287
Totals	...	311,038	39,500	350,538

The Mutiny was not, of course, confined to the 137,000 sepoy of the Bengal Army. There was general discontent along the whole Ganges basin, and particularly in Lucknow, where the deposition of the King of Oudh had alarmed every landlord, and had shaken the confidence of the peasants, many of whom had fought bravely in previous wars on the British side.

The revolt was the result of an accumulation of small

grievances over a long period. The high-caste sepoys of the Bengal Army (recruited from what is now the United Provinces, not Bengal) had been volunteers attracted by regular pay, fair treatment, and the prospect of glory and gold. Gradually, as India became pacified, there was less gold, and no particular glory. Soldiering had ceased to be a lucrative and glorious sport. Sometimes the British lost, as in Afghanistan. There were frequent disputes about *batta*, the allowance made to troops serving away from their homes. And what if these foreigners should impose their Christian creed on India? as they had already imposed their uncomfortable ideas about the sanctity of legal contracts. Law and order were all very well, but it was a dull life if money-lenders could never be liquidated. In the good old days, although *banias* charged high interest, there was always the chance that the flames of some local affray would cause them—or at least their books—to disappear in smoke. But now they seemed established on everlasting foundations, and able to collect their interest with all the power of the State behind them. Was it to be made a bondsman to a *bania*, the sepoy asked himself, that he served the British?

The spark that set fire to such discontents was the affair of the Greased Cartridges. These were for use with the new Enfield rifle, which was shortly to be issued to the Indian Army. Centres of instruction had been formed, where the drill for loading the rifle was taught, which included biting off the greased patch at the base.

Grease of former cartridges had been made of coconut oil and beeswax: that of the new, of tallow and beeswax, and the tallow was prepared from an English formula containing animal products. A staff officer in Calcutta had pointed out that the purity of the ingredients used in cartridges was important in India, since the cow was sacred to Hindus and the pig an unclean animal to Muslims. His memorandum, however, met a not uncommon fate: it was carefully filed and completely forgotten.

Years before the outbreak, astrologers had predicted that British rule in India would last exactly a century from Clive's victory at Plassey. They were wrong, yet not far wrong, for on June 23rd, 1857, British fortunes were at their ebb, at Delhi, at Lucknow, and at Cawnpore, where the defenders behind their flimsy entrenchments were at the brink of their grim tragedy.

The astrologers, it is reasonable to suppose, derived their foreknowledge of events from worldly sources as well as from the stars. Plans for the revolt were being whispered throughout India, even if it was not planned by any regular council of conspirators.

An epidemic of fires swept over the cantonments of Upper India during the spring of 1857. Amongst the pilgrims and ascetics who roamed those districts, then as now, word passed that the Goddess of Destruction would soon be satiated with sacrifice. Some carried the *chapatti*—a small flatjack of unleavened bread—which was supposed to be a signal, though no one would admit he knew its meaning. Others whispered—falsely—that the Amir of Afghanistan and the Shah of Persia were waiting but the hour to invade India. (In fact, both these rulers realised that the British would win.) Here and there, in various battalions, there were protests that someone had been tampering with their food, or adulterating the medicine in the hospital, in order to pollute the caste of the sepoys. Sometimes a courtesan would withhold her favours from a soldier, mocking him for having licked the fat of pigs or cows. Many servants warned their British masters that trouble was brewing. In Ferozepore the billiard-marker of Her Majesty's 61st Foot told the officers that he had heard men saying in the bazaar that blood would soon flow. The subalterns laughed, but many of them remembered the remark afterwards, as they stood to arms during the long hot nights on the Ridge at Delhi.

It was in Meerut that the storm broke. A squadron of the 3rd Bengal Cavalry had refused to carry out the new drill, and had been severely punished by officers who afterwards displayed their incompetence by failing to take stern measures when these were really necessary. Eighty-five troopers were court-martialled, sentenced to long terms of penal servitude, and on the morning of May 6th they were paraded in front of the whole garrison of Meerut, when iron shackles were riveted to their limbs. British officers present have recorded that they were sickened by the spectacle. The culprits, however, instead of being abashed by their ignominious fate, shouted curses on their commanding officer as they clanked off the parade in their fetters.

On Sunday evening, May 10th, when the British troops were in church, the 3rd Cavalry broke out of barracks and made for the officers' bungalows. They were followed, after some hesita-

tion, by the 11th and 20th Bengal Infantry. Many officers were shot at sight: some were saved by their men, who took them to a place of safety before joining the mutineers.

The first objective of the 3rd Cavalry was the jail, where they liberated their comrades and all other prisoners. Other mutineers went to the bazaar and plundered the shops. Others went to the city to rape and loot. Meerut was on fire. Friend and foe could not be recognised in the darkness. Night fell on a scene of horror.

Leaving the city under a pall of smoke, the mutineers seized all the horses and vehicles they could find, and galloped off to Delhi, forty-two miles away.

Meanwhile the General commanding in Meerut, who had two British regiments, the 60th Rifles and the Carabineers, as well as two batteries of British artillery at his disposal (all under strength, yet a force sufficient to wipe out the 2,000 mutineers in a few hours) did nothing. Absolutely nothing. He did not even send a messenger to Delhi (the telegraph had been cut) to warn the troops there of the revolt. His lethargy is all the more amazing by contrast to the energy displayed and the bold decisions taken elsewhere, under similar circumstances; nor can he have been entirely surprised by the mutiny, after the parade which he had ordered only four days previously.

The first rebels reached Delhi as dawn was breaking; they were men of the 3rd Cavalry, and clamoured at the river front of the Palace, demanding that the old King should show himself.

Bahadur Shah had no immediate intention of putting himself at the head of what might well have been a lost cause; but he made an appearance, and reproved the soldiers for their bad manners. His Queen, however, was bolder. Whatever Zinat Begum said, the mutineers took it to be encouragement. They rode on to Daryagunj, the Christian quarter, where the half-castes lived, and took their fill of massacre. Then they went to the jail, and thence to the city. Rumour had spoken true. Blood flowed like water. What they did that morning does not bear telling in detail.

Nevertheless, there were Indians of every class, from Rajahs to the poorest peasant, who stood by the British at this fearful juncture, often at great risk to themselves, and sometimes in circumstances when they could expect no earthly reward.



Most diaries of the Mutiny contain such records of fidelity. Fidelity not to the British cause, which after all was an abstraction, but to individuals. One such story, typical of many, was told to the present writer by a colonel now serving in the Indian Army, whose grandparents were killed in Saharanpur during those evil days. Long afterwards the father of my friend was visited by a servant, who brought a letter which he recognised to be in his mother's writing. It was a brief note, written in haste, before a burning bungalow collapsed. "*Ibrahim Buksh has been faithful to the last,*" she wrote. "*We have sent him away. The bungalow is on fire, and the sepoys are coming.*"

Ibrahim Buksh was well rewarded; and my friend has followed the family tradition of Indian service, and is training three thousand recruits with passionate devotion to the rising generation.

At Arrah (twenty-nine miles east of Patna) 12 Englishmen and 50 Sikhs held a small two-storied bungalow against a well-armed host of 2,000 mutineers. The enemy had several pieces of artillery, and brought a gun to bear against the bungalow from a distance of fifty yards. The defenders held on against desperate odds, for the mutineers were joined by a mob from the city. The Sikhs, at any rate, might easily have saved themselves by surrendering. Far from doing so, they were prepared to die to a man in defence of the post. They ran short of water. The enemy set fire to the roof. Round-shot crashed into the house. At last, after a week of great peril, they were relieved by the 5th Fusiliers.

The Residency at Lucknow was defended by 780 British and 700 Indian soldiers, who were surrounded and continually attacked by night as well as day by rebel forces fluctuating in number from 30,000 to 50,000. Houses filled with enemy sharpshooters looked down into the defences from a few yards' distance, and the enemy fired his cannon into them at point-blank range; mines were sprung under the redoubts, and the garrison was constantly in danger of being overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. Heat, flies, stench from corpses, the continual bombardment, constant sickness and constant casualties made life in the Residency terrible beyond description. The British had to face the matter out, for there was no alternative. For the Indian troops, on the other hand, and for the servants who entered of their own free will, desertion was

not difficult. A few did desert, but the majority chose to endure unflinchingly the grimmest siege in history.

One more example of "kindness in another's trouble" must be given; it is too curious to be omitted.

Sir Theophilus Metcalfe, Joint Magistrate of Delhi, was living in Metcalfe House (built by his uncle) on the fateful morning of May 11th. After visiting the Palace, he realised that escape was the only alternative to being murdered. His horse was fat, having been out at grass; after cantering a few miles, he discovered that he was being followed by half a dozen of the Meerut troopers. Knowing he would soon be overtaken, he looked about for a hiding-place, and noticed a Hindu ascetic sitting at the mouth of a cave.

Here was his only chance of life. Turning his horse loose, he entered the cave, promising the *saddhu* a liberal reward if he would give him shelter. To his surprise the man agreed.

Metcalfe entered, taking his sword with him, and found himself in an underground passage with a recess at the far end.

Presently the troopers came. They saw Metcalfe's horse grazing nearby, and asked the *saddhu* where the Sahib had gone.

Metcalfe listened for the reply, on which his life depended. The *saddhu* declared that he had seen no one. "Liar!" cried one of the troopers. "The white monkey is hiding in there!"

"Not so," said the *saddhu*. "But you can go in and look, by all means. You might be able to kill the demon who lives in there, if he doesn't cut off your head first."

One of the troopers swore that he didn't believe in demons. "Neither did I," said the *saddhu*, "until I came here."

After some hesitation the doubting *sowar* entered, while Metcalfe, his eyes now accustomed to the dark, watched his adversary groping along the passage.

Those outside heard a terrible cry, and a moment later the trooper's head came rolling to the cave's mouth. The mutineers gasped, then with one accord they sprang to saddle and made off as fast as their tired horses could gallop.

Metcalfe emerged triumphant. "You will not be forgotten for your good work," he said to the *saddhu*. "But why did you take such risks to save a stranger?"

"You are not a stranger," the ascetic answered. "I appeared before you in court."

"And you won your case?"

"No, I lost it. It was a boundary dispute, and your verdict was for my opponent. I was lying. You are a just man, therefore I saved your life."

\* \* \*

This is not the place to tell of the operations against Delhi, nor of the great risks taken by John Lawrence in denuding the Punjab of troops required for the capture of the great city on September 20th, 1857;<sup>1</sup> nor of the relief of Lucknow on September 24th, which further served to depress the spirits of the mutineers. The worst was over before the cold weather set in. Sir Colin Campbell reconquered Oudh and Rohilkund in the winter of 1857-58, and Sir Hugh Rose marched up from Bombay to restore order in Central India. The embers of the conflagration smouldered long, but the flames had subsided with the fall of Delhi.

Madras and Bombay had stood firm. So had the Amir of Afghanistan in the north, the King of Nepal in the east, the Nizam of Hyderabad in the south, and the Maharajah of Patiala in the north-west.

The Proclamation of Queen Victoria, placing Indians on an equality with British subjects, and associating them in the government of the country, was read by the Viceroy at Allahabad on November 1st, 1858. Soon afterwards a Commission was appointed to advise on the reorganisation of the Indian Army. One of its recommendations was that the proportion of Indians to British should be not more than three to one, and approximately these strengths have been maintained since that time, as shown by the following table :

			<i>Indians.</i>	<i>British.</i>	<i>Totals.</i>
1863	...	...	205,000	65,000	270,000
1887	...	...	153,000	73,000	226,000
1903	...	...	142,000	77,000	219,000
1923	...	...	139,000	66,000	205,000
1939	...	...	177,000	43,000	220,000

Indian troops went to the China War of 1860, and won a

<sup>1</sup> "The bloody city, full of lies, and treachery," as the Prophet Nahum said of Nineveh, in the first lesson for Sunday, September 14th, the day the assault began. Many devout people, who knew what was impending, marked the prophet's words: "My hand is against thee, saith the Lord of hosts."

great reputation there. They were also employed on expeditions to Burma and Assam, in the Abyssinian War of 1867, the expedition to Perak, and in Malta in 1878.

In the same year the long Afghan War broke out. The Treaty of Gandamak was signed in 1879, and Sir Louis Cavagnari entered Kabul with a fine cavalry escort; but soon afterwards he and his men perished in an Afghan rising. This outrage was avenged by Sir Frederick Roberts five weeks later, but in the winter of 1880-81 the forces of Afghanistan were withdrawn through the Kurram and Khyber Passes.

From that day forward there has been more or less constant conflict along the North-West Frontier of India, fostered in the main, not by the Afghans, but by the border tribes. Much blood has been spilled there, without diminishing the affection which the British feel for the sturdy and adventurous Pathan.

Between 1888 and the end of the century there were many campaigns on those lawless marches: in the Black Mountain, in Miranzai, and in Hunza Nazar; against the Wazirs, and for the relief of Chitral.

In 1895 the three Presidency Armies were regrouped and united under one authority, the Commander-in-Chief.

On the North-East Frontier there was fighting against the Chins, Lushais and Abors. An Indian expeditionary force sailed to China in 1900 for the Boxer Rebellion, and in South Africa Indian troops helped to hold Ladysmith and save Natal. When Lord Kitchener arrived in Simla in 1902 he inaugurated large reforms, but since these were subject to drastic changes after 1914-18, and both have been rendered null by mechanisation, they need not be described here.

\* \* \*

During the critical early months of the First World War, when Great Britain found herself, as usual, unprepared for a major conflict, Indian aid was invaluable. Before the end of 1914 there had arrived at Marseilles 21 cavalry regiments, 68 battalions of infantry, and 204 field guns. Thus the British—who had no reserve of trained men—were able to strengthen their hard-pressed line at Messines, while the morale of the French was heightened by the arrival of such strong reinforcements.

The Indian troops were sent to Orleans, and thence hurried,

as yet ill-equipped, into the frozen trenches south of Ypres, where the Germans harassed them with grenades and trench mortars, to which they could not reply. "It would be impossible to imagine conditions more terrible for Eastern troops," wrote Sir Frederick Smith, afterwards Lord Birkenhead.

Many were the deeds of heroism during those grim months. In the early hours of October 31st, 1914, the 57th Wilde's Rifles were heavily attacked by nine German battalions near Mesines. In one part of the line a platoon of Dogras was cut off and enfiladed. (I must be pardoned for selecting a sector of the front with which I was acquainted.) They died to a man in their positions rather than retire. The last to be left alive was the Jemadar I have already mentioned, Kapur Singh, who shot himself with his last cartridge in order not to fall into enemy hands.

Farther south, Havildar Ganga held on to his part of a trench after all his officers had been wounded and his comrades killed. Eventually he fell and lay as if dead, with six wounds in his body, but when the trench was retaken he was alive, and had killed five Germans. He received the Indian Order of Merit.

Brigaded with the 57th at this time were the gallant 129th Baluchis. On one occasion their two machine-guns (a battalion possessed only four in those distant days) were attacked by a greatly superior force. Five men out of the crew of six were killed at their post. The sixth, Sepoy Khududad Khan, though grievously wounded and left by the enemy for dead, managed to crawl away. He was the first Indian soldier to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

\* \* \*

Up to the end of 1914 the casualties in France of the Meerut and Lahore divisions were as follows :

British : killed, 653; wounded and missing, 2,000.

Indians : killed, 944; wounded and missing, 6,182.

The original strength of the two divisions was approximately 24,000 men, so it was evident that the corps was in need of rest and reconstitution. It was not long out of the front line, however, for it took part in the attack on Neuve Chapelle on March 10th, 1915, and was then sent to Mesopotamia, where it

assisted at the capture of Baghdad and the destruction of the Turkish army at Shargut.

Indian troops served also in Gallipoli, Palestine, South Africa and Persia, besides guarding many important lines of communication. In all 1,302,000 men were recruited. Casualties amounted to 106,594. Twenty-one V.C.s were awarded to Indian troops, in addition to numerous other decorations and awards.

The years between the Great Wars saw much reorganisation and some heavy fighting on the North-West Frontier, including an attempted invasion of India by Afghanistan.

The period, however, was marked by a constant emphasis on economy, in Delhi as in London, and a relegation of the soldier to the background of national affairs, leaving India, like Great Britain, but ill-prepared for the struggle ahead.

## IV

### *Indian Troops in this War*

AS we have seen, India possessed in 1939 a fine professional army with old traditions. That its equipment was also old, dating from the last war, need occasion no surprise; only Germany was ready for the enormous struggle that lay ahead.

The strength of the Indian Army was 177,000 at the outbreak of war (exclusive of State forces), and out of this total 65,000 men were required for lines of communication and similar purposes. From this modest foundation has been built up the present force of two millions.

Bricks can be made without straw, but nothing will teach a man to drive a car except driving a car. Neither instructors nor training equipment can be improvised. It was a hard road which martial India was to follow, and in the early stages of the conflict she could not expect to enjoy any kind of priority for material. Desperate needs came first. Britain was fighting for her life after the evacuation at Dunkirk. Then came the needs of the Middle East. Hardly had Egypt been reinforced when the Balkans claimed every weapon we could spare. Then came the colossal German onslaught on Russia, and following it the crises in Malaya and Burma. Then a new crisis in Egypt.

Under such circumstances what has been accomplished is remarkable. In some respects it is truly amazing, particularly in the steady influx of volunteers since 1942, rising sometimes to 70,000 a month. I would not say, however, that British planning has always been amazing, or even remarkable for its foresight. In 1940 there seems to have been lack of vision. For instance, in the first eight months of war only 53,000 volunteers were enlisted: they were ready to come forward by the hundred thousand, and greater provision could have been made for a definitely foreseeable expansion in personnel once the equipment was available. Similarly in the Royal Indian Navy, with its seven small sloops, and in the Indian Air Force, with its dozen antiquated machines, an easy-going, self-satisfied

attitude prevailed. Complacency is an English vice, and a new sense of urgency became apparent only when a new Commander-in-Chief was appointed in 1941; it was only then that India began an industrial, naval, military and aerial development commensurate with her man-power and resources.

\* \* \*

Lord Wavell has well described the prowess of Indian troops in the first years of war. "They fought in the dusty wastes of the Western Desert, in the bush of the Abyssinian border, on the dry and scorching plains of the Sudan, in the towering, rocky mountains of Eritrea and Abyssinia, and amid the softer and greener hills of Syria.

"With their comrades from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and many other parts of the British Empire, the Indians utterly defeated two great Italian armies; they helped to hold Tobruk and to stem the German counter-offensive in Cyrenaica; and to save Iraq from enemy domination.

"At Keren and Amba Alagi they stormed two positions which their enemies had with some reason deemed impregnable; at Mechili an Indian motor brigade fought with impressive gallantry to cover a retreat; a brigade of an Indian division led what seemed a forlorn hope against the defences of Damascus, and by their courage made the capture of that city possible. India may be proud of her troops which performed such feats."<sup>1</sup>

Since then they have delivered one of the main punches at El Alamein, outflanked the Mareth Line, and fought their way northward through the Apennines. Much they have accomplished, and in all human probability they are destined for yet greater deeds, although Sidi Barrani and El Alamein will always mark great moments in history.

#### EVACUATION OF BRITISH SOMALILAND

Little need be said about the first campaign of this war in which the Indian Army was actively engaged—that of British Somaliland, whither the Black Watch, the 2nd Punjab and the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Archibald Wavell in a foreword to *The Tiger Strikes*.



15th Punjab Regiments were sent to cover the British evacuation in August, 1940. Casualties were 158, whereas those of the Italians were more than 1,500, so the enemy paid dearly for his temporary success. Once again the value of sea power was demonstrated, which made the withdrawal possible.

#### ADVANCE IN EAST AFRICA

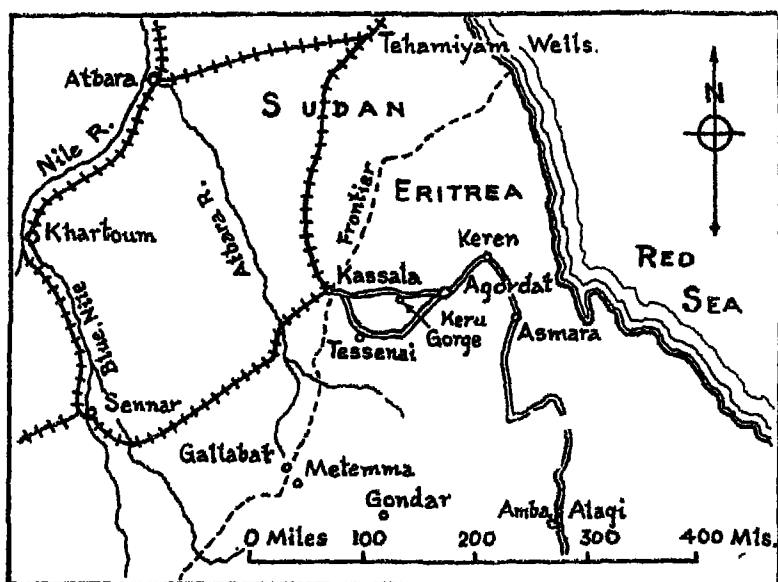
The hazards of the British position in Egypt may be reiterated from the African angle. While Graziani was moving the northern claw of the Italian pincers nearer Cairo, the southern claw was also advanced by the occupation of British Somaliland with 25,000 men, while from Abyssinia the enemy was closing in: the fort of Gallabat on the Sudan frontier was occupied on July 4th, 1940, as was the important railway station of Kassala, with its lines running to Khartoum and Port Sudan.

To keep the Red Sea route open was vital, for the Mediterranean was growing increasingly dangerous, and only a trickle of supplies could come by air from Takoradi, across the immense breadth of Africa. A quarter of a million Italians were threatening the only safe line of communications, and threatening also to advance down the Nile. A merely passive defence in regard to these threats would have tied up a large proportion of the small forces available. Rather than tie them up, the alternative was a bold offensive.

Hence the arrival of the 5th Indian Division on the Sudan frontier in September, 1940. Hence, also, the switching of the 4th Indian Division from Egypt to the Sudan in December. The 5th Division was commanded by Major-General L. M. Heath. The 10th Indian Brigade (Brigadier W. J. Slim) consisted of the 1st Essex, 4/10th Baluch Regiment, 3/18th Garhwal Rifles, with a squadron of the Royal Tank Regiment attached. The 9th Brigade (Brigadier A. G. O. M. Mayne) consisted of the 2nd West Yorks, the 3/5th Mahratta Light Infantry and the 3/12th Frontier Force Regiment, with three motor machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force attached. The 29th Brigade (Brigadier J. C. O. Marriott) consisted of the 1st Worcesters and the 3/2nd Punjabis. Attached to the division was a fast mechanised reconnaissance formation, known as Gazelle Force, under Colonel Messervy, con-

sisting of Skinner's Horse and the remaining three motor machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force. Lines of communication were guarded by the 6/13th Frontier Force Rifles and the 2/5th Mahratta Light Infantry.

A lightning blow was struck at Gallabat on November 6th, 1940, by the 10th Indian Brigade, in co-operation with the R.A.F. The attack was successful, but the greater part of the twelve tanks in the attached squadron were damaged in the fighting, and, since no further advance was possible without



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them, the fort was evacuated on November 8th. Meanwhile Gazelle Force had attacked the Italian positions to the north of Kassala, with inconclusive results, although the Italians were thoroughly shaken and put on the defensive.

In December the 4th Division was moved southward by Port Sudan and the Nile Valley; so that Lieut.-General Platt, commanding in East Africa, had by the beginning of the new year two of the finest divisions in the British Empire to unlock the door of Eritrea.

Two divisions, against at least ten that the enemy might

have mustered! But the Italians played for safety, in spite of the protests of their local commander, who saw in retirement a disastrous loss of prestige. By order of Mussolini, Kassala was to be evacuated, and the troops were to fall back to defend the road to Keren and Asmara.

The Italian withdrawal began on the night of January 17th, 1941, and led to a change in British plans, which had been made for an attack on Kassala early in February. General Platt advanced on January 19th, in order to hit the enemy while he was on the wrong foot. Crossing the frontier of Eritrea, the 5th Division occupied Aicota on the 21st, while the armoured cars of Gazelle Force were in contact with five enemy battalions in the Keru Gorge on the 22nd.

A brilliant outflanking march brought the 10th Indian Brigade behind the enemy position at Keru on the 22nd, when an enemy brigade was routed and a general and 1,200 men taken prisoner. Gazelle Force had penetrated eighty miles into Eritrea by the morning of January 25th; and soon afterwards the battles of Agordat and Barentù were fought and won. Our total captures were 6,000 prisoners, 80 guns, 26 tanks, and 400 trucks.

The Italians were in a panic, and Eritrea might have fallen swiftly had they not been reinforced by some crack battalions, notably the Alpini and the Savoia Grenadiers sent hastily from Addis Ababa to Asmara. (Napoleon once expressed the opinion that these North Italians are the best infantry in Europe.)

Gazelle Force, with the main body following, pushed on with all speed. Fifteen miles east of Agordat the dry Baraka River was spanned by a bridge which the enemy had destroyed; he had also heavily mined the sandy watercourse. Clearing this obstacle took eight hours, which gave the Italians time to perfect the already long-prepared defences of Keren.

The plain below the tableland on which the town stands is two miles broad, with no cover but dry thorn. A wall of razor-like ridges ascends to a height of 2,500 feet above the plain, which narrows to a gorge (the Dongolaas) dominated by ridges and peaks which have passed into history: Samanna, Brig's Peak, Sanchil and Cameron Ridge to the north of the valley, and Pinnacle, Pimple, Acqua Col, and Fort Dologorodoc to the

south-east. The hills are 6,000 feet above sea-level, but it was the rise from the plain which counted: Samanna was a sheer rise of 2,500 feet, Dologorodoc of 1,500 feet.

The Italian position was held in great strength, with good communications to the base at Keren. There was a pipe-line for water to Sanchil, and a road for vehicles to Dologorodoc. Our numbers were less than half those of the enemy, and all the approaches were commanded by his artillery. On February 3rd, 1941, the 2nd Cameron Highlanders made their first assault at Sanchil, to the north of the road, and established themselves on a secondary ridge 1,000 feet below the summit, which will always bear their name. Next night the 3/14th Punjab Regiment passed through the Highlanders and reached Brig's Peak, but they could hold it only a few hours. The Camerons maintained their position, however, and were reinforced by the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles.

Cameron Ridge was held only by desperate efforts. A young lance-corporal of the Rajputana Rifles, Bhaira Ram, found himself in command of seven men (once a platoon) after a day of constant bombardment. That night he was heavily attacked and a neighbouring platoon overrun, when the whole weight of the assault came on his tiny post. He lost five men out of his seven, but when the Italians eventually retreated he chased them with his remaining two men. Eleven of the enemy lay dead just outside his post, and there were many more on the hillside. For this night's work he received the Indian Order of Merit.

An attempt was made on February 7th to seize the heights on the south-east side of the road. The Rajputana Rifles had the task of scaling Acqua Col. Subadar Richpal Ram, the second-in-command of the leading company, led the forward platoon to its first objective. After his company commander was wounded he took the remaining thirty men to the top of the ridge and captured it at the point of the bayonet. Between midnight and 4.30 a.m. he was counter-attacked six times. By now his ammunition had run out and he was surrounded, but he charged his way through the enemy and brought the few survivors safely back to company headquarters.

Five days later he led another attack on Acqua Col. Near the top his right foot was blown off by a shell. He had himself propped up against a rock and continued to direct the attack;

but he was then wounded again, and died, cheering his men on with his last breath. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.<sup>1</sup>

Gallant attempts to rush the Keren defences all failed. Had the attackers possessed even one brigade with mule transport, they might have maintained the positions they won, and thus forced their way through, but without mules the necessary ammunition, food and water had to be carried up by hand, which depleted the already insufficient man-power. There was nothing for it but to reorganise and try again.

In order to ease the transport situation, the 5th Division were sent back to railhead at Kassala, the supply trucks thus released being used for bringing up shells to the front. Cameron Ridge could not, of course, be surrendered. It dominated the road, and was held at a cost of fifty casualties a day during the waiting period of over four weeks.

To the north of Keren, meanwhile, in the rear of the Italian position, the 7th Brigade of the 4th Division<sup>2</sup> had been advancing from Port Sudan, with many ruses to make the enemy believe that an attack was coming from that quarter. By March 15th the brigade had reached the northern defences of Keren in high mountainous country similar to that which faced the 4th and 5th Divisions. Having no artillery, it could mount no real offensive, but the threat engaged the attention of some six or seven battalions of the Keren garrison.

On the eve of the historic battle for the Keren heights, brief mention must be made of two other events, both distant, but which both served to distract the Italian defence. The first was the brilliant campaign of the 11th African Division from the Kenya border, which brought it in little more than a month

<sup>1</sup> This was the second Victoria Cross given to an Indian in this war. The first had been won a few days earlier, February 5th, on the road between Gallabat and Gondar, by Lieutenant Premindra Singh Bhagat, of the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, who cleared fifteen mine-fields along more than fifty miles of road. Several times he was blown out of his vehicle, and he had his ear-drum ruptured by the blast of one explosion, yet he continued with his task. His Commanding Officer well described this exploit as one of the longest-continued feats of sheer cold courage he had ever seen.

<sup>2</sup> Consisting of the Royal Sussex, 4/16th Punjab Regiment, a battalion of the Foreign Legion, and a battalion of Senegalese from Lake Chad.

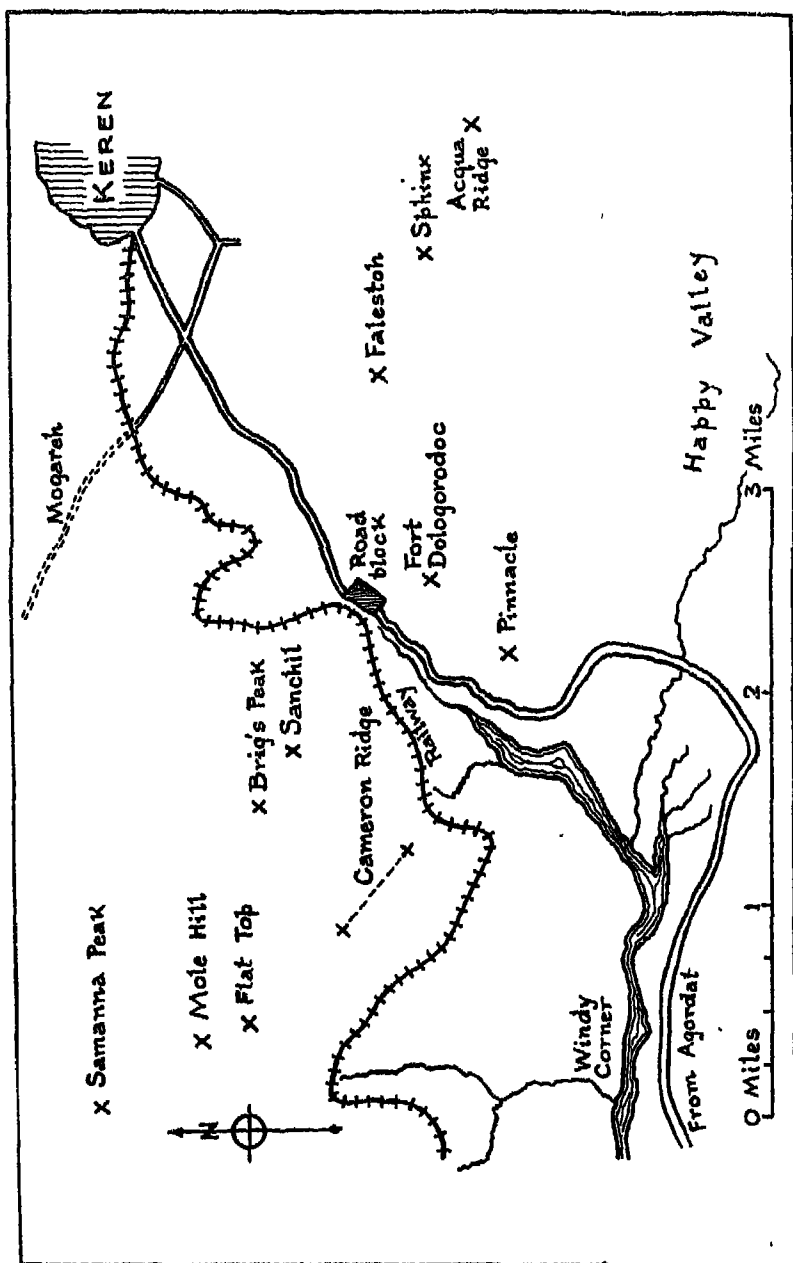
from Kismimayu in Italian Somaliland to Jijjiga in the southern highlands of Abyssinia, where it arrived on March 17th, 1941. The other threat to the Italian position in Abyssinia came from the Emperor, who was marching towards Debra Markos and Addis Ababa from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. He was still on his way to Debra Markos when the Keren battle started, but thousands of his subjects had already rallied to the standard of the Lion of Judah. On May 6th he was to re-enter his capital, but long before this time his presence had shaken the whole Italian position.

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The final battle for Keren began on March 15th, 1941. The Italians had 33 battalions, subsequently reinforced by 9 more: British and Indian troops consisted of 19 battalions. Artillery was about equal—120 guns on each side. Our only advantage was in the possession of 12 heavy tanks, but these could not operate until a two-hundred-yard-long demolition on the Keren road had been removed, and this could not be accomplished so long as the eastern and western heights were dominated by the enemy.

The first assault, launched by the 4th Division at 7 a.m. on March 15th, had again for its objectives the crest of the Sanchil and Samanna mountains. They were reached, but could not be held. Meanwhile the 5th Division, waiting under the lee of Cameron Ridge, were unable to cross the valley in daylight in order to attack Fort Dologorodoc. The Highland Light Infantry tried to do so, but were pinned to the ground by murderous cross-fire from Sanchil. When evening drew on the 3/5th Royal Mahratta Light Infantry went forward (undeterred by the constant stream of casualties from the H.L.I. which had been passing their front all day) and under cover of darkness crossed the valley and seized Pinnacle Ridge, suffering heavy casualties in doing so.

During the night they were counter-attacked four times, but held on grimly. At 1 o'clock in the morning of March 16th, the 3/12th Frontier Force Regiment exploited the Mahrattas' gains, and at 4 a.m. the 2nd West Yorks continued the advance by taking Fort Dologorodoc. This gallant feat of arms eventually decided the battle, although it was to last another ten days.



KEREN.

Heroic attacks were again made to seize the heights on the north of the road: Sanchil, Brig's Peak, Samanna. The Cameron Highlanders and the Royal Fusiliers went forward time and again; so did Sikhs, Mahrattas, Punjabis, and Garhwalis. In the 3/18th Garhwal Rifles every British officer became a casualty, and the commanding officer was killed. After victory, many bodies were found of individual men who had pushed on to their objective when all those around them had fallen. On the summit of Brig's Peak lay the corpses of three Cameron Highlanders.

The northern attack could not maintain itself, yet its courage and tenacity wore down the nerves of the enemy, thus contributing to victory. The southern attack, however, held on to Dologorodoc and exploited the ground beyond. The brave West Yorks were relieved by the 3/5th Royal Mahratta Light Infantry on March 19th. The latter were counter-attacked three times during the night, but stood immovable.

At last the morale of the Italians began to flag. They could not dislodge the troops on Dologorodoc, and their losses had been heavy. Deserters from the Colonial battalions were many, and it was afterwards learned that the Italians lost 1,135 killed and 2,300 wounded in the five days March 15th to 19th.

Pressure was not relaxed for a moment. The R.A.F. bombed and burned the aerodromes at Massawa and Asmara, and now possessed local air mastery. The northern peaks were kept under a storm of steel. The enemy were demoralised; British and Indian troops in good heart, inspired by splendid leaders. At 4.45 a.m. on March 25th, 1941, the final attack began.

Brigadier Messervy led his 10th Brigade to the Sanchil side of the road block in the valley. Meanwhile Brigadier Mayne led the 9th Brigade down from the slopes of Dologorodoc to attack the enemy at the south side of the block. The engineers cleared the obstruction under heavy fire, and our infantry tanks passed through. That was the crisis of the battle. By the evening of March 26th the pass was open.

On the morning of March 27th the Italians put up white flags on Sanchil and Brig's Peak, which the attackers had never been able to hold. By then British tanks and Indian Bren carriers were in Keren and beyond.

Eritrea was as good as won. True, there was still hard fight-



ing for Asmara, and a skirmish before Massawa, but the back of the Italian resistance was broken. The Italians had suffered a shattering defeat. March 27th, 1941, marked the beginning of the end of the Italian Empire.

Losses had been heavy, nearly 5,000 men out of 13,000 with which the Imperial troops had started the campaign, but many of the casualties were lightly wounded, and returned to the ranks within a few weeks. Medical arrangements were exceptionally good. An officer who was wounded in the fighting at Dologorodoc at 11 a.m. on March 20th was carried downhill in a stretcher under heavy fire (he was dropped once, and broke his tail-bone) and was evacuated by ambulance so speedily that by 8 o'clock that evening he was in hospital in Agordat, lying in a bed with sheets on it and attended by a pretty nurse. It was the first bed and the first white woman (he told me) that he had seen for seven months.

\* \* \*

Asmara was captured on April 1st, 1941, and Massawa on the 8th. Addis Ababa was taken by the South Africans on April 6th, and the Emperor entered his capital on May 5th. Major-General Mayne, now commanding the 5th Division, marched south to Amba Alagi, where a large force of Italians under the Duke of Aosta were gathered, while the 1st South African Brigade was moving north from Dessiè.

The great peak of Amba Alagi, towering among the surrounding mountains and commanding a narrow pass, must have looked to the 5th Indian division at least as formidable as the terrible razor-backed ridges which had protected Keren. And indeed the position was as formidable as any that has confronted a commander in this war.

Major-General Mayne estimated that heavy casualties would be inevitable—at least a thousand—and made his dispositions for attack by a double flanking movement to the east and west, the main punch to come from the west, while the South African Brigade held a feature to the south. This plan was skilfully carried through, and the Italians deceived as to where the main assault would be delivered. However, before the final engagement a lucky hit from a 6-inch howitzer blew up an enemy petrol store, and the spirit percolated into the Italians' water supply, which compelled almost immediate surrender.

Thus was this great fortress reduced with astonishingly small loss of life. The 5,000 prisoners taken on May 18th included H.R.H. the Duke of Aosta, Commander-in-Chief of the Italian armies in East Africa.

\*                      \*                      \*

#### REARGUARD AT MEKILI

The rout of the Italians at Sidi Barrani in December, 1940, was followed by a close pursuit which ended only with the brilliant cutting-out operation at Beda Fomm, 60 miles south of Benghazi, on February 8th, 1941. In this phase Indian troops took no part.

Thereafter there was a lull. Wavell could pursue no further without a pause for reorganisation; moreover, the needs of Greece were a paramount political consideration, and troops had to be taken out of the line to support a gallant ally. It was then that the Italo-German forces in North Africa saw their opportunity, and attacked in overwhelming strength. In the retreat of March, 1941, the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade played a small but historic part.

Immediately the Germans reached Benghazi they organised an armoured force to travel by the direct inland track, south of the Jebel Akhdar, and through Mekili, to cut off the British main body before it could gain the shelter of Tobruk. To counter this threat, the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade was sent out from El Adem, near Tobruk, with orders to occupy Mekili and delay the German advance as long as possible. It was composed of armoured units from the 2nd Royal Lancers, Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11th Frontier Force) and the 18th King Edward VII's Own Cavalry, with some Australian anti-tank gunners and British riflemen attached.

Mekili is a nine-mile-wide saucer of sand, about 100 miles west of Tobruk, with one solitary habitation, a little stone-and-mud fort containing the wells which give the place its importance, for there is no other water in the neighbourhood.

The brigade arrived at Mekili on April 5th, 1941, and at noon next day enemy bombers appeared, landing on an aerodrome some three miles away. Shortly afterwards a patrol reported that a large enemy column, accompanied by heavy guns, had arrived behind the Luftwaffe. The brigade had no artillery

heavier than 2-pounder anti-tank guns, so its situation was already precarious. Presently the enemy moved up a howitzer, and began to shell the post. Then two truckloads of infantry drove round to the east of the position: they were allowed to come within 600 yards before fire was opened. The first truck was set alight. Both halted, and out of them emerged two German officers and forty Italian soldiers, who were made prisoners. Shortly afterwards a German officer and three men were also captured.

Several more attacks were beaten off. Early on the morning of April 7th, a British 'plane dropped a message that strong enemy columns were moving up from the east and south, which was stale news to the brigade; indeed, a dozen heavy guns were already visible two miles away. Presently a German staff officer arrived in an armour-plated car, flying a white flag, to demand unconditional surrender.

The brigadier refused. Far from thinking of capitulation, he *intended to do all the damage he could before retreating*. Shortly after the German officer's departure British guns scored a direct hit on a truck, out of which three officers and thirty other ranks were captured.

So far so good; but the enemy was becoming very thick on the ground. The brigade was unquestionably surrounded, and would shortly be blown to pieces unless it moved. It had by now accomplished its task of delaying the German advance; and since the position was untenable, it was decided to try to break through to the south at first light on April 8th.

Unfortunately a line of five guns to the east of the fort cut off the line of retreat; unless they were silenced there was little chance of any of the garrison escaping. Thereupon a squadron of the 18th Cavalry (24 trucks, 10 Bren carriers, and one cruiser tank) was chosen for this task, a mission as desperate as the charge of the Light Brigade, but with a sound military objective.

A little before 7 o'clock on the morning of April 8th, the squadron roared down on the enemy, divided to right and left at the guns, jumped out of its trucks, and went in with the bayonet. Four of the five guns were destroyed. Early in the attack the cruiser tank had been knocked out, but many of the other vehicles got away. Casualties were only seventeen in this gallant attack.

As soon as the guns were engaged the remainder of the

brigade drove out in small groups. There were heavy losses in men and vehicles, but few of the men were left behind, and some of the parties even took prisoners on the way back to Tobruk. The survivors were re-formed, and were destined to engage in another brave exploit, in which, unfortunately, they again suffered heavily.

#### DAMASCUS

After Crete fell to the German parachutists the enemy began penetrating into Syria, and it became necessary to secure the country from the Vichy French, who were taking no decisive measures to counter German intrigue.

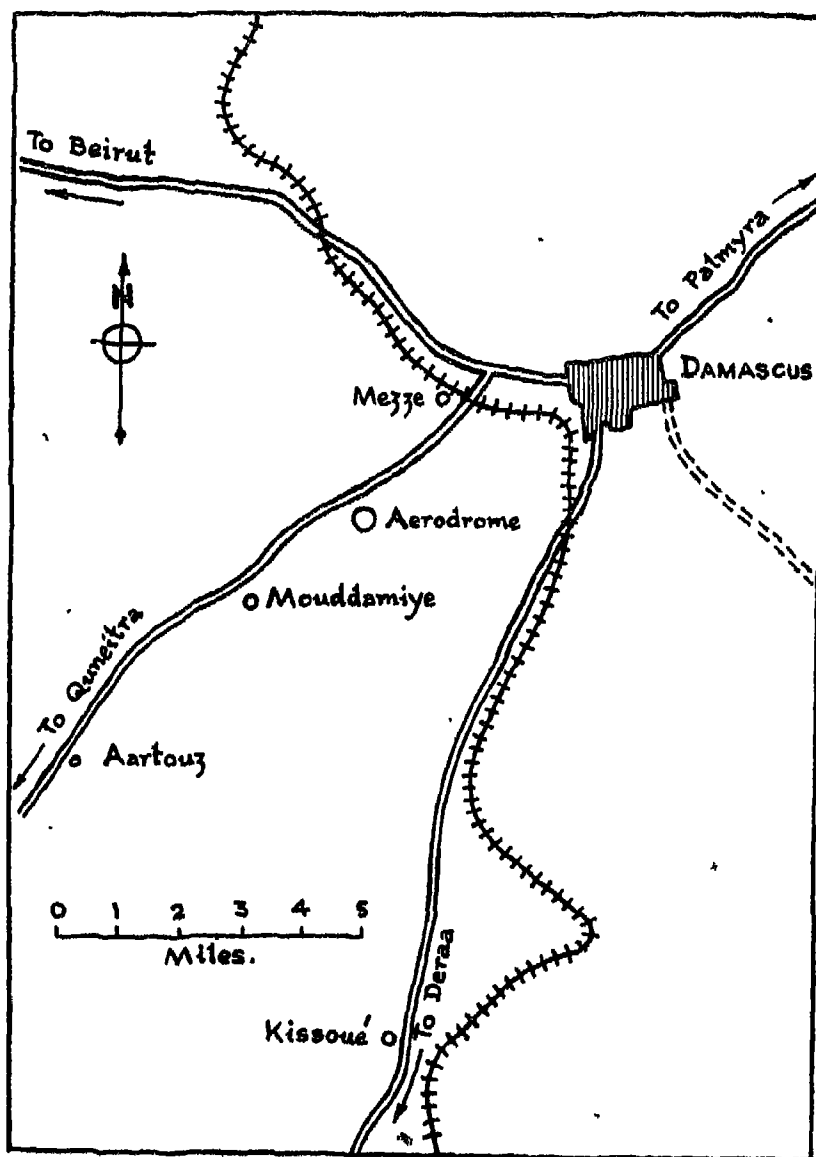
Early in June, 1941, British and Indian forces began to enter Syria from Palestine, and with them went the 5th Brigade of the famous 4th Division.<sup>1</sup> At first the advance was slow, because an envoy with a white flag always preceded any attack, in order to avoid bloodshed as far as possible. The Vichy French, however, confident in their superiority in armoured fighting vehicles and artillery, always refused such offers.

Stern fighting developed on June 15th for the possession of the village of Kissoué, ten miles south of Damascus. The two Indian battalions (Rajrifs and Punjabis) were in the centre of the attack, which was to be directed upon the village itself and a hill beyond. On their right the Free French were operating, and on their left the Royal Fusiliers were established at Quneitra, with one company thrown forward along the Quneitra-Damascus road, but not in touch with the enemy.

At dead of night the Indians debussed close to Kissoué. Without any artillery preparation, in order to make surprise complete, the 1st Punjab Regiment went in with bayonet and grenade. The village was captured before dawn. By 5.15 a.m. artillery began to register on the peak behind Kissoué. Soon afterwards the Rajrifs, with memories of the terrible heights of Keren, went up these easier slopes in dashing style. "What you have done is unbelievable," said a Free French officer. "Your Indians are magnificent!"

After beating off several counter-attacks, including a mounted charge by a squadron of Spahis, which left the plain strewn

<sup>1</sup> Royal Fusiliers, 3/1st Punjab Regiment, and 4/6th Rajputana Rifles.



DAMASCUS.

with men and horses, the two veteran battalions went forward to capture yet another hill, nearer Damascus.

Elsewhere, however, things had been going badly. The Fusiliers at Quneitra were surrounded and heavily attacked. When they ran out of ammunition all but one company were forced to surrender. On the right flank also the Free French were being hard pressed and could make no progress. In face of these difficulties, which would have caused many commanders to hesitate, Brigadier Lloyd adopted Foch's famous saying: "We are outnumbered, our flanks are threatened, and our communications cut—so we attack!"

The exhausted Indians were given twenty-four hours' rest before engaging on what proved to be a terrible ordeal. The plan was to pass through the enemy defences by night, on the west flank of the Quneitra-Damascus road, and seize the village of Mezze, two miles west of Damascus, thus cutting the French line of retreat by road and rail to Beirut. The Free French were to co-operate by attacking up the Kissoué-Damascus road, and at daybreak the artillery and anti-tank guns, which could not move across country in the dark, would be brought up to reinforce the troops at Mezze. The sole surviving company of the Royal Fusiliers was to remain in reserve.

At 8.30 p.m. on the night of June 18th the column to attack Mezze moved forward in the following order: 1st Punjab Regiment, Brigade Headquarters, Rajputana Rifles, a detachment of Bombay Sappers and Miners, and twelve supply vehicles. Four miles up the road the little village of Mouddamiye had to be cleared of the enemy in order to allow the vehicles to pass. A company of the 1st Punjab Regiment was detailed for this task, which was carried out by 10.30 p.m., several tanks being put out of action, and a strong post seized. Unfortunately, however, the transport column, soon afterwards, went forward in advance of the troops (it was a dark night) and bumped into a road block covered by machine guns. Several vehicles were disabled; the remainder were compelled to retreat, and were eventually pinned down in an olive grove near Mouaddamiye. The brigade now possessed no reserve ammunition, and no food beyond what the men carried.

The advance continued, however. Some enemy gun pits were knocked out, and several others side-skipped. There was opposition from the aerodrome to the east of the road, but this was

ignored. At 4.15 a.m. Mezze was reached, after a twelve-mile march in six hours, against considerable opposition: a fine feat of leadership, which would have been impossible without highly trained troops.

Three guns had been sited on the southern outskirts of Mezze to fire down the road: their crews were all killed with tommy guns (two crews by Subadar Muhammad Akbar of the 1st Punjab Regiment, who received the Indian Order of Merit), also an ammunition lorry was blown up, and a tank set on fire. By 5.30 a.m. on June 19th, the enemy had been driven out of the village.

A company of the Rajrifs went on, farther north, to straddle the Beirut road and railway. They turned back a train, set fire to a petrol dump, and created considerable alarm in Damascus, which was, of course, the object of the whole manœuvre. They were attacked by five heavy tanks at 9 a.m. and retired in good order on Mezze.

Brigade headquarters and a company from each battalion were now concentrated in Mezze House, a large building surrounded by wall, which happily proved to be a tank obstacle. The remainder of the force held isolated strongpoints, and were soon engaged in desperate fighting, as the Vichy French deployed the whole garrison of Damascus against them. Heavy tanks (35 tons) appeared soon after 9 a.m. and broke through into the village. A company of the Rajputana Rifles ran out of ammunition and were compelled to surrender, but the other strongpoints held on grimly.

Owing to the loss of the first-line transport, the men had no food except a little fruit which they found in the garden. Medical stores ran out. The many wounded were bandaged with sheets taken from Mezze House. Attacks continued all day, with heavy guns firing point-blank, and heavy tanks followed by infantry. Many men were wounded twice, sometimes three times, only to return unflinchingly to their posts.

All through the night the attacks continued. Rifle fire had to be controlled so strictly that on one occasion the enemy reached within a grenade's throw of the house and lobbed a bomb into a room where the brigade commander was holding a conference. When daylight came on the 20th the relieving column could be heard fighting its way up past Mouddamiye. A battery could be seen engaging the enemy, sometimes in

advance of its own infantry, but it was evident to Brigadier Lloyd that his famished and exhausted garrison could not hold out much longer.

By now the Vichy forces had brought guns up so close that the roof of Mezze House collapsed. While the wounded were being removed the enemy attacked. They were driven back with heavy loss, but for the last time. The troops had not eaten for thirty-six hours and could do no more.

That afternoon (June 20th) what was left of this fine brigade was captured. Fortunately, however, the majority of officers and men remained prisoners only for a brief period, for they were exchanged for Vichy French under the terms of the subsequent armistice.

The 5th Indian Brigade had fulfilled its task, for as the result of the forty-eight-hour fight the bulk of the Vichy forces had been drawn away from Damascus. On June 21st, 1941, the city surrendered to the Free French.

#### HONG-KONG, MALAYA, BURMA

The full story of the British reverses in the Far East in December, 1941, and the early months of 1942 would involve criticisms which can only be made after the war. But whatever faults there may have been—indeed, must have been—the heroism of many units and individuals stands out all the more clearly against a background of confusion and dismay.

\* \* \*

At Hong-Kong the Indian Army lost two fine battalions in the 5/7th Rajput and 2/14th Punjab Regiments as well as artillery, medical and transport units. Once the Chinese counter-attacks on the mainland had failed, the fall of this great port was inevitable, handicapped as it was by a swarming population and a precarious water supply.

\* \* \*

To guard the Malay Peninsula two great battleships, *Prince of Wales* and *Renown*, had arrived at Singapore a week before Japan's attack at Pearl Harbour on Sunday morning, December 7th, 1941. Three days later (December 10th) they were sunk by bombs and torpedoes. With them sank, on that



disastrous afternoon, British chances of controlling the sea routes to the Dutch East Indies and Japan.

Had the Allies had available a couple of hundred fighter 'planes of modern type, the Japanese could never have landed in Malaya. They were not available in 1941, and could not have been made available without starving some other more important front. Fifty Hurricanes did arrive in crates during the operations, but not more than half of them were able to take the air. Ancient Buffaloes and Lysanders were bravely flown, and did good work, but were outclassed and outnumbered.

The enemy's air superiority gave speed and vigour to his advance. Moving at the average rate of nine miles a day, the Japanese marched in fifty days from the borders of Siam to the Straits of Johore. During the night of February 8th-9th they landed four thousand troops on Singapore Island. A week later they had occupied the great city and the great naval base with its enormous floating dock and its immense transmitting station, the most powerful in the world.

Throughout these terrible days Punjabis, Jats, Sikhs, Rajputs, Gurkhas, Dogras and Madrassis distinguished themselves for their discipline and tenacity. Thus has a planter from Malaya described the conduct of the Gurkhas: "Although it was dark and they could not see their targets clearly, although they were tired after many days of continuous fighting, although their rifles were useless against tanks, nevertheless they had behaved like the trained and disciplined soldiers they were."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Sikhs of the 9th Indian Division, who took part in some of the fiercest fighting at Kota Bahru, where the first landing was made, behaved with their traditional courage and inflicted severe losses on the enemy when he came ashore.

Neither the equipment nor the training of the defending forces was adapted to jungle war. Without air power, automatic weapons, and with few armoured vehicles to support them, and burdened by much unsuitable gear, they were continually retiring in face of the lightly armed infiltrating Japanese. Retreat was inevitable, but does not seem to have been planned with a view to an eventual line of resistance and counter-attack. Casualties were high, yet their resistance was producing no

<sup>1</sup> *Malayan Postscript*, by Ian Morrison (Faber and Faber, 1942).

decisive result. General Wavell arrived at the front on January 9th, 1942, and ordered a withdrawal of some 125 miles to the "Johore Line." It was a bold decision, and vitally necessary, for it was past high time to concentrate British and Indian troops rather than allow them to be frittered away in small packets.

The Johore Line broke, however. Some of its defenders had but recently disembarked and were unacclimatised. All who had borne the brunt of the early fighting were exhausted by the retreat, though there were units such as the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, whose toughness and discipline will long be remembered by all who took part in the campaign. When this gallant battalion marched across the Johore Causeway, with its pipes playing, it had lost in killed or wounded 600 of the 850 men who had gone into action in the early days of December.

The Highlanders were in the thick of the battle again during the last stages of the defence, after the Japanese had landed at Kranji Creek and Pasir Laba. The northern skyline of Singapore was then a curtain of smoke from burning oil tanks. There were constant air raids. The mixed native population, Chinese, Malayan, Tamil, was lost and leaderless. There was panic among the labourers at the docks.

Indian troops fought with great discipline and determination in what was now a hopeless situation, for there was no rallying-point once the enemy had gained a footing in the island. By Sunday night, February 15th, 1942, the Japanese were masters of Singapore, and more than 60,000 British and Indian troops remained prisoners in their hands. It was—and let us hope ever will remain—the worst disaster that has befallen British arms in the East.

\* \* \*

While the Japanese were occupied in Malaya, they confined their attacks on Burma to the British aerodromes at Mergui and Tavoy. On December 23rd, 1941, however, Rangoon was heavily bombed, causing many civilian casualties. Further attacks followed on succeeding days, and from then onwards the port operated with difficulty, owing to many stevedores having decamped.

The forces defending Burma consisted of some 4,000 British,

12,000 Indian, 20,000 Burmese and some 50,000 Chinese troops, but the last were situated far to the north, so that only about half of them came into action, and then only at the end of the campaign. The air force, as has been said, was quite inadequate, though a volunteer American squadron covered itself with glory.

Japanese forces consisted of some 60,000 veteran soldiers who had fought in China, Thailand and Malaya, with two tank regiments and supporting aircraft, which so far outnumbered ours that by January, 1942, the enemy had complete air supremacy.

At the end of this month it was plain that the British forces could hope to do no more than fight a delaying action. After a heavy engagement they withdrew to the west bank of the Salween River at Moulmein. By February 10th the Japanese had occupied Martaban, to the west of Moulmein.

On February 17th-18th the crossing of the Bilin River was contested in some of the fiercest fighting of the campaign, but it was impossible to prevent the constant envelopment of the British flanks. The next defence line was the Sittang River, where the Japanese seized a bridgehead before the 17th Indian Division had been able to cross. One brigade was captured, only a few of its components having succeeded in making their escape by swimming; there were, of course, heavy losses in equipment. The situation at Rangoon was also deteriorating rapidly, and it was almost impossible to control the stream of civilian refugees seeking safety to the north and west.

A British armoured brigade and a battalion of the Camerons reinforced the capital towards the end of February, but the situation was now such that Rangoon could not be held. The 17th Indian Division with the armoured brigade retreated along the road to Prome, while the 1st Burma Division moved to Toungoo. General H. R. L. G. Alexander assumed command of our forces in place of General Hutton on March 5th, and a few days later considerable Chinese forces moved south to support the British.

By now, however, the Japanese had been able to reinforce their advance with troops from Malaya, and the results were soon apparent. On March 22nd they raided Magwa aerodrome and destroyed many of the remaining British 'planes. A strong enemy force, pushing up towards Toungoo, drove back two

Chinese divisions. Thus the Chinese and their British allies were split and never able to rejoin.

Enemy supplies and reinforcements were pouring into Rangoon, and there was faint hope of keeping open even the upper stretches of the Burma Road. Whatever chance there had been of maintaining land communication with Chungking was destroyed when the Japanese drove back the 55th Chinese Division and moved up to Lashio, where they arrived on March 26th, 1942.

Mandalay was repeatedly bombed during April, and practically destroyed. All that could be done (during 1942) was to extricate Allied forces to India and China—a difficult and dangerous task which was faithfully accomplished.

The Allies were Beaten in Burma and Malaya by causes beyond their control; but whereas grave mistakes were committed in Malaya, the campaign in Burma, like the evacuation of Dunkirk, was a defeat without disgrace; indeed, the withdrawal from Toungoo to Mandalay, and thence to Shwebo, Kalewa and Imphal, will ever remain an outstanding example of the most difficult of all military operations—retreat in a mountainous country with exhausted troops.

Subsequent operations in Burma during 1943 brought no fortune to Allied arms. It was found impossible to take Akyab owing to lack of shipping and other naval equipment. The Wingate Expedition, however, was an earnest and harbinger of larger operations of a similar kind.

#### LINES OF COMMUNICATION

In 1941 the Premier of Iraq, Rashid Ali, attempted a revolution in Baghdad which would have cut the Persian Gulf route to the Middle East. His régime was short-lived, however, thanks to two Indian Army columns, which converged on the capital from Palestine and Basra.

During this year, also, Persia was entered from the south by Indian forces, and from the north by Russia, in order to guard against the activities of German agents who were threatening to sabotage the southern supply line to the Russian armies facing the German onslaught of the summer of 1941.

## ADVANCE AND RETREAT IN LIBYA

We must turn again to the Western Desert to survey the tides of fortune which led at last to the high flood of victory.

It will be remembered that December, 1940, saw the British in Mersa Matruh, and February, 1941, at El Agheila. In April, 1941, they were driven back to the Egyptian frontier, with Tobruk still in their hands as a threat to any further enemy advance.

In November, 1941, they advanced again, from the Egyptian frontier to El Agheila, which they reached in late December. The second retirement, owing to the pressure of Rommel, began in January, 1942. By February the front ran from Gazala to a point some fifty miles south, in the desert. After a lull of four months the Germans attacked (May 26th, 1942) and drove the British back to El Alamein (sixty-five miles west of Alexandria), where Sir Claude Auchinleck made his historic stand during the fateful month of July, 1942.

Then the tide turned. Reinforcements and equipment arrived in increasing quantity. On October 23rd, 1942, Sir Bernard Montgomery began the attack which is destined to rank with Stalingrad (February 3rd, 1943) as one of the decisive battles of the world.

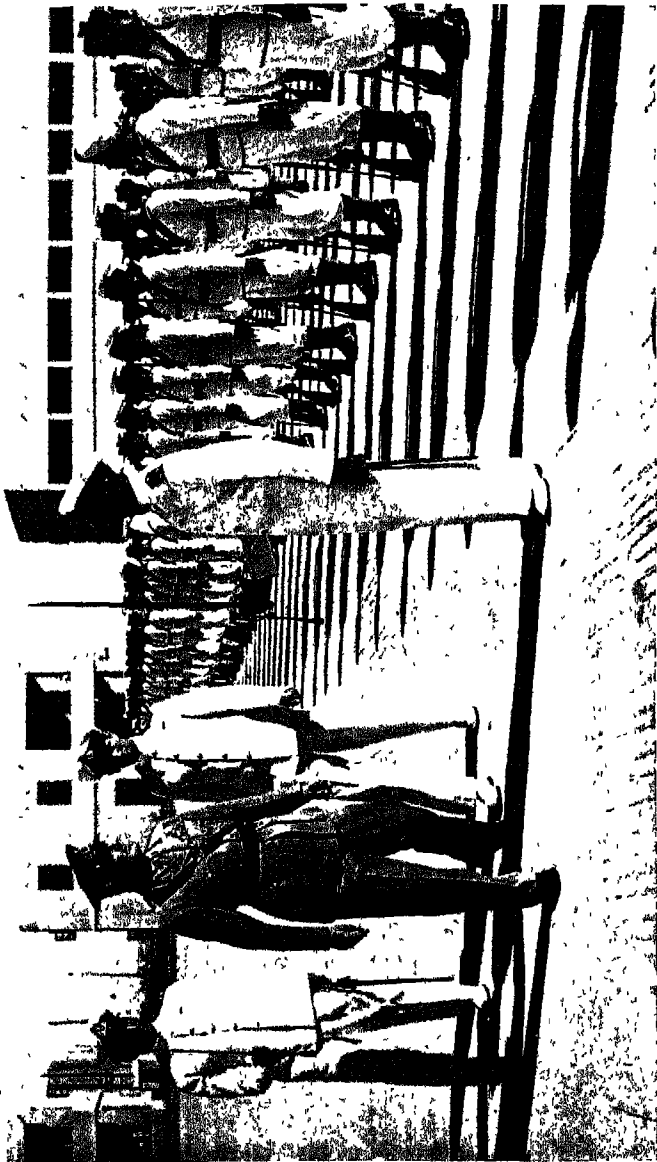
A record of many actions fought over similar terrain would be confusing unless described in greater detail than is possible here. I take up the story, therefore, at the end of 1941, when Auchinleck began the operations which led him forward again to Agedabia, within a hair's-breadth of victory, and then back to the very edge of defeat on Ruweisat Ridge.

## AUCHINLECK'S ADVANCE

On November 18th, 1941, a great armada of vehicles left the Egyptian frontier, driving north and north-west to engage Rommel's Panzer divisions and relieve Tobruk. In the van went the veteran 4th Indian Division. Further south, units of the 5th Division, operating from Giarabub, created a diversion towards the Jalo Oasis, where some 700 Italian prisoners were captured.



*Subadar Lal Bahadur Thapa receives the Victoria Cross from the King in North Africa*



*The Viceroy inspecting H.M.I.S. Himalaya, gunnery school of the Royal Indian Navy*



*General Sir Claude Auchinleck decorating Jemadar Ghulam Rattani*





*Typical volunteers from left to right, two Punjabi Moslems, a Rajput a Jat, and a Sikh*



*Haq Nawaz Kairani fishing in Kashmir*



*Machine-gunner in jungle*



*An Indian Mountain Battery passing through the road block at Keren*



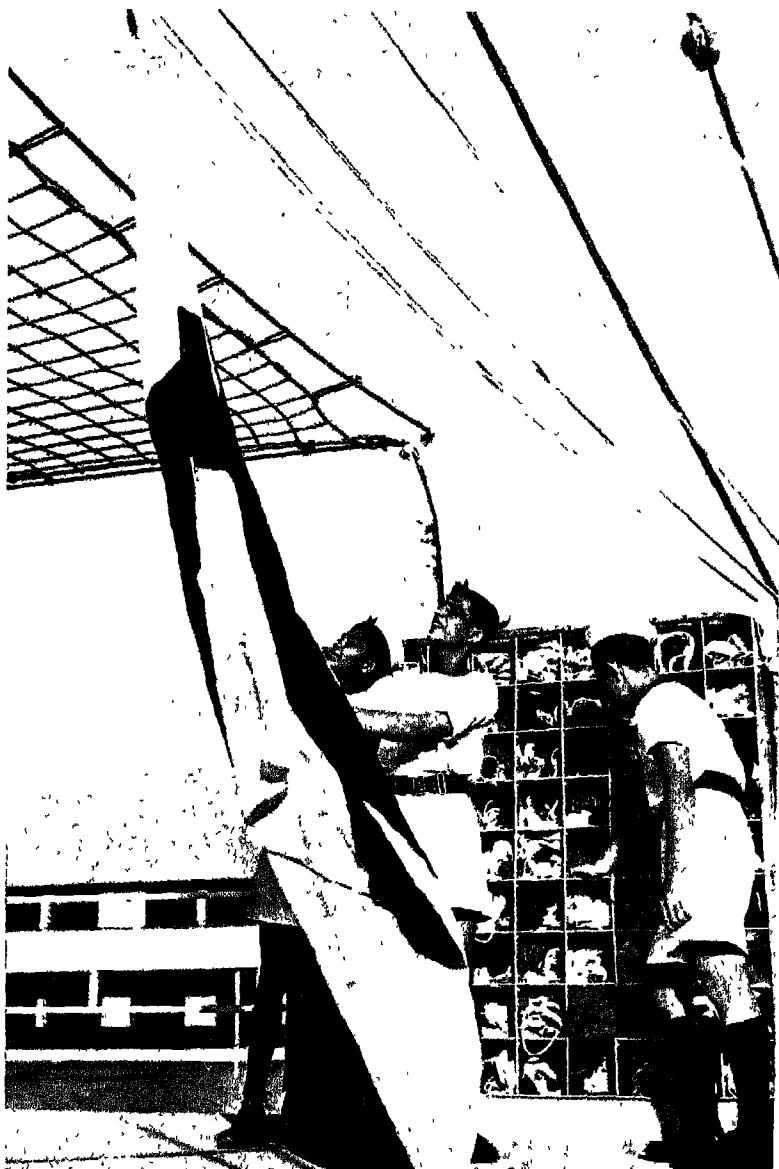
*Troops of 11th (Indian) Division attack in Tunisia*



*Lieutenant-Commander (E) Daya Shankar, D.S.C., Royal Indian Navy*



*Leading Seaman Ismail Muhammad, IDSM*



*Boy-Signallers of H.M.I.S. Bahadur*





*Squadron-Leader Mehar Singh (left) with Wing-Commander Suboto Mukerji*



*Flying Officer S. E. Sukthanker, DFC*



*Lord Louis Mountbatten (right) with Sir Richard Peirse on the Burma Front*



*Chief Petty Officers Betty Khan (left) and Molna Imam, both W.A.C.(1)s,  
Naval Wing*



*Petty Officer Barry, W.A.C(1), Naval Wing*

There was stiff fighting at Sidi Rezegh, where the Panzers attempted a break-through to cut communications. This threat was overcome, and Tobruk was relieved. By December 17th it was known that the enemy was in full retreat. On Christmas Day, 1941, units of the 4th Division were eating their dinner in Benghazi, having led the van of the infantry pursuit with the greatest dash. Meanwhile the Indian column at Jalo Oasis had struck across the open desert, capturing many prisoners on the way. After a difficult march it reached a position south of Agedabia, close to the limit of the advance.

Supply difficulties made a further immediate pursuit impossible; and early in the new year it became clear that Rommel was preparing to hit back in great strength, having been reinforced in heavy tanks and in the deadly 88-millimetre anti-tank gun.

On January 21st, 1942, the German counter-attack began, and could not be held. Not yet had the British found the answer to the Mark III and Mark IV tanks. Their 2-pounders were outranged, and the British and Indian infantry, gallantly as it fought, was constantly overrun by sheer weight of metal. The 4th Division lost heavily during its fighting retreat from Benghazi to Cyrene and Derna. East of Derna a halt was called. The position on February 6th, 1942, ran south-west from the sea coast at Gazala for fifteen miles to Alem Hamza, then south-east for thirty-five miles to Bir Hakim. Behind this line vigorous preparations went forward for a further and—it was hoped—final drive to clear the Germans out of Africa.

High expectations of success were formed on the British side during the four months' lull in large-scale operations. Spitfires were now becoming a common sight in the desert. Eight hundred of the new 6-pounder anti-tank guns had been marked for Middle East priority. Heavy American tanks (Grants and Shermans) began to trickle through in March and April. Reinforcements were such that by May the Germans were facing for the first time a foe with greater material resources than their own, and there were now more Indian troops in the fighting line or near it than had been assembled for any previous battle of the war.

Although the 4th Division had been sent to the rear for reorganisation, the 5th was camped near Tobruk, and had been brought up to full strength. The 10th Indian Division

arrived at Sollum on May 25th, and was soon afterwards in the battle, which opened next day. There were also two other Indian brigades, of which one was the 3rd Motor Brigade, re-formed after its heroic rearguard action at Mekili.

On the last-named fell the brunt of the German onslaught, launched by Rommel at 8 p.m. on May 26th, 1942. At first light next morning the brigade commander saw that practically the whole Afrika Korps was drawn up on his front. Soon it was on the move. The brigade's inner core of 25-pounders took a heavy toll of the enemy armour; nevertheless, successive waves of heavy tanks broke through. Men went down fighting to the last, and a handful of carriers of the 18th Cavalry charged to certain death, as they had at Mekili, though here their attempt to rescue their comrades was unavailing. Our losses were 200 killed, 1,000 wounded and 1,000 prisoners.<sup>1</sup> But the Germans paid dearly for their success: fifty tanks lay wrecked before the brigade's position.

On this morning of May 27th the 5th Division was also in action farther north. All looked promising, for a column of enemy armour had passed inside the minefields, and the barges intended for refuelling it had been sunk off Gazala headland. An Italian tank division was driven back with heavy loss, and the famous German 90th Light Infantry Division was scattered near El Adem. A few days later a communiqué from Cairo announced that 150 enemy tanks had been knocked out, and that the same number were pinned against a British minefield. "Evening fell with the enemy in utter disorder as the result of air and ground attacks," the communiqué concluded.

Unfortunately, there was in reality more bad than good news. On the night of May 31st-June 1st a British brigade was captured by a German encirclement which penetrated the British defences on parallel lines and reached their heart. On June 5th the 5th Division suffered heavy losses in an encounter with Panzers. During the next fortnight tank battles of varying size and intensity raged south of Tobruk. By the morning of June 14th the enemy had so far depleted the British armoured

<sup>1</sup> Yet the brigade lived to fight again, for many of the men were shortly afterwards released, the advancing Germans being unable to find them food or water. The brigade was reorganised at Buq-Buq and formed part of the rearguard to El Alamein. It was then sent to the Delta to refit.

fighting strength that retreat was inevitable. He then moved up to attack Tobruk.

Tobruk was to have been a bastion once again, denying the enemy's advance beyond the Egyptian frontier. Amongst the garrison were two battalions of Indian troops, who did all men could do to avert the coming disaster.

At 7 a.m. on June 20th a terrific bombardment, accompanied by heavy bombing, descended upon the troops guarding the perimeter. A small gap was opened in the minefield, which was promptly enlarged by the Germans under cover of a smoke screen. Squadron after squadron of Panzers came crashing through. British armour, coming to the rescue of the infantry, was soon smashed; then the Germans fanned out along the high foreshore, spreading havoc.

Throughout that evening and night there was confused fighting in the town. Next day, July 21st, 1942, Tobruk capitulated. More than 25,000 Imperial troops were killed, wounded or captured. It was a grave and unforeseen disaster, and it has not yet been fully explained.

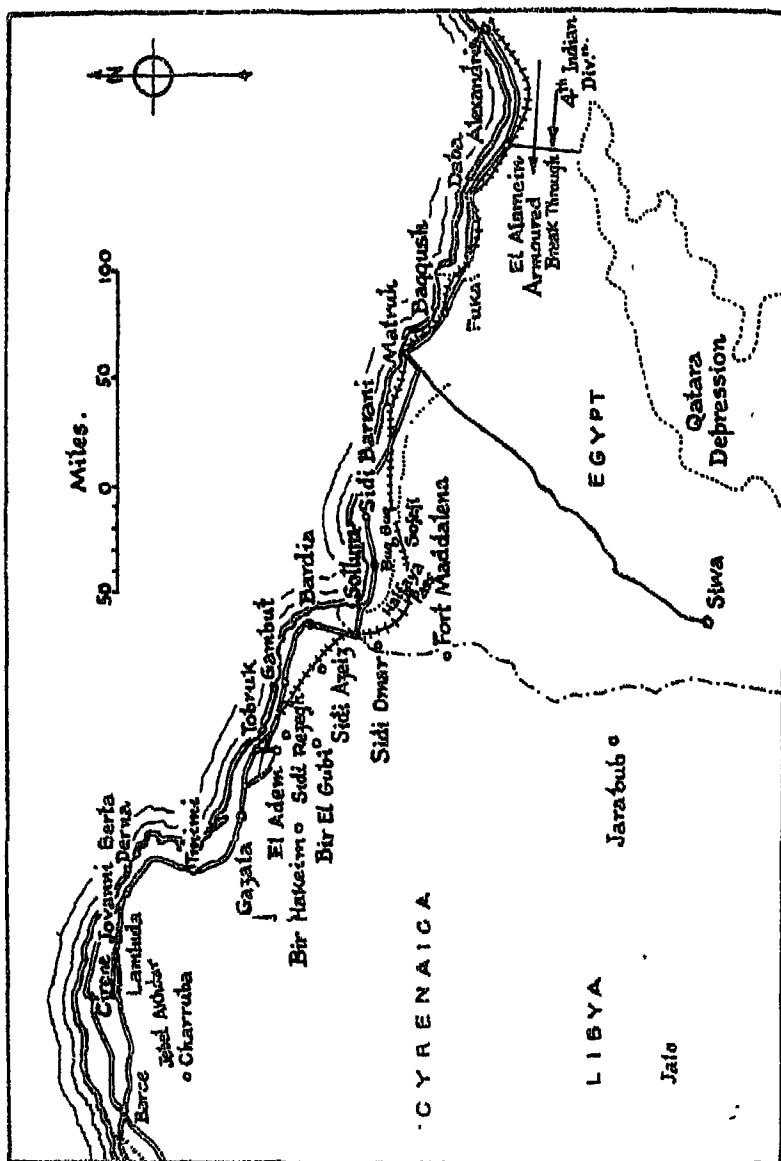
Speedy withdrawal was inevitable. Things looked black for the Allies. Would Cairo hold? Could Stalingrad be saved? The Germans were advancing on both fronts.

At last, with many a deed of unrecorded heroism, the Eighth Army halted at El Alamein on July 1st, 1942. Sir Claude Auchinleck took personal command. He went from group to group, cheering and inspiring his tired men. Only the strong knees of the troops—so many of whom were Indians—and the tenacity of their commander saved Cairo. History will remember Auchinleck, and the men who stood at Alamein.

Rommel was held. During three months reinforcements arrived in a steady stream from Great Britain and India, and invaluable tanks from the United States. The British were at the end of the longest supply line in the world, the 12,000-mile route round the Cape and up the Red Sea, yet their reinforcements and supplies had arrived in ever-increasing quantities, thanks to the Navy; whereas four-fifths of the enemy ships crossing the Mediterranean were sunk or severely damaged.

When Rommel spoke to the Press in Berlin on October 3rd, saying that he held the gateway to Egypt "with full intention to act," he knew well enough how precarious his position had become and how changed since those July days when two





**TEL ALAMEIN.**

exhausted and depleted armies had faced each other. He had struck north and south and centre then, without being able to do more than dent the British line. Now the denting was being done by the other side.

#### EL ALAMEIN

The opposing lines of minefields, wire and gun emplacements dividing twelve German divisions from ten of Imperial troops, stretched forty miles from the sea to the Qattara Depression. Somewhat to the north of the centre lay the Ruweisat Ridge, a finger of sand running east to west, which Indian troops had held with the greatest gallantry during July, and where now, in October, the 4th Division were again encamped.

At 9.30 p.m. on Friday, October 23rd, under a brilliant moon, the barrage began: the greatest concentration of artillery which had yet been seen in the Middle East. Half an hour later the muzzles of 1,200 smoking-hot guns were lifted, and British and Dominion troops went forward to the assault. By 5.30 a.m. next morning they had taken a certain number of prisoners and had penetrated four miles of the enemy's minefields upon a line six miles long.

For nine days this wedge was widened and deepened, in spite of heavy counter-attacks. Rommel had expected the main British thrust to come in the centre of his line, where his defences had been deliberately thinned, for he had disposed his tanks to the north and south of this point, so that they might converge on any attempted break-through and make a killing. Instead, Montgomery punched a hole in the north, and Rommel had to concentrate his armour there, where British tanks were later able to deal it a crippling blow.

The task of the 4th Division was to pin down the enemy near the Ruweisat Ridge, and this it did throughout the early stages of the battle, so that the Germans could not move any troops to the hard-pressed north. After a lane had been opened in the north on November 1st it became necessary to clear another field, forward of the Ruweisat Ridge. This task was allotted to the 5th Brigade of the 4th Division.

The brigade moved forward on the late afternoon of November 2nd, 1942. At nightfall the 1st Essex, the 6th Rajputana Rifles and 10th Baluch Regiment advanced to their rendezvous

between lines of lit and shaded petrol tins; and at 1.30 a.m. 400 guns opened up a front of 800 yards, the barrage being lifted at the rate of 35 yards a minute, cleansing the ground of mines and dug-in enemies. Lines of tracer shells lit the edges of the lane the guns had cut. For four hours the infantry moved forwards, meeting little opposition, though here and there small groups of Germans, who had somehow escaped the curtain of high explosive, were bayoneted or sent captive to the rear. So the way was made—more than four miles of it—which led to the open desert.

Armoured fighting vehicles crept up behind the infantry. The barrage lifted, then ceased. At the first streak of dawn the tanks advanced. It was an historic moment, and in years to come—indeed, already—every Indian serving with the "Fourth Div." will tell the story of how he helped to clear the path of victory at El Alamein.

How the Germans were routed with four British divisions at their heels cannot be told here, for Indian troops had no part in the famous pursuit. We take up the story again when the enemy had halted on the Mareth Line, 170 miles west of Tripoli.

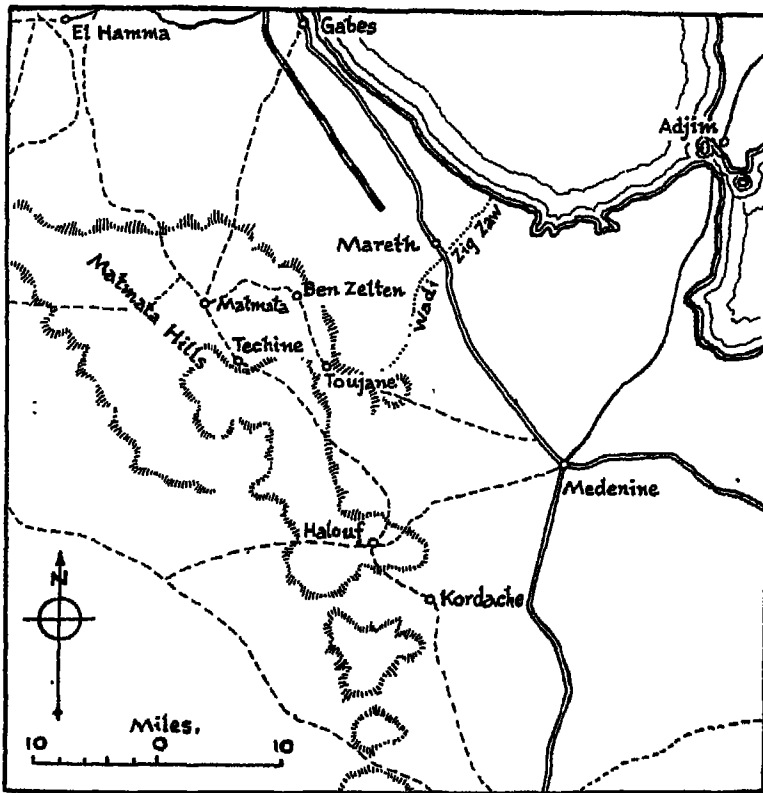
#### WADI ZIG ZAOU AND THE MATMATA HILLS

At the end of February, 1943, the call came for the 4th Indian Division, then in Benghazi, engaged on stevedores' tasks, to move forward to the front line. It reached Medenine on March 15th.

The Mareth Line, originally constructed by the French for the defence of Tunisia, had been hastily repaired by the Germans. In the coastal belt the defences were strong, but further south, in the rugged and precipitous Matmata Hills, only detached outposts guarded the mule-paths and tracks to the Gabès plain. In front of the little town of Mareth a deep gorge, the Wadi Zig Zaou, marked the outposts of the old French fortifications.

The attack was mounted for the night of the full moon, March 20th, 1943. Sir Bernard Montgomery planned a left hook with the New Zealand Division and a right punch from the 50th (Northumbrian) Division. The former would make a flank march southwards, round the Matmata Hills, and fall on

the enemy's rear. The latter would thrust straight at the Mareth position, and if successful its gains would be exploited by the 4th Indian Division. Thus Rommel would be compelled either to throw his tanks into the Mareth Line or else to retire to the plains behind, where the New Zealanders, with their



MARETH LINE.

new 6-pounder anti-tank guns, might well be able to knock out his Panzers.

The New Zealanders carried out their part of the operations brilliantly, and compelled the Germans to assemble their armour in the Gabès plain; but the frontal attack was not so successful.

A bridgehead was duly established across the Wadi Zig.

Zaou, but it could not be maintained, for the track leading across the gorge to the forward troops kept collapsing under the weight of vehicles. To the Madras Sappers and Miners was given the rôle of pathmaker. Shortly after midnight on March 23rd they grappled with this tremendous task. Under heavy fire they bound fascines, cut ramps and laid steel mesh. A new road was made, though at the cost of severe casualties. Before dawn on March 24th the 50th Division was again across the *wadi*. The Germans might have been broken then, had not the weather intervened. A rainstorm broke. The trickle of the *wadi* became a torrent. Rommel saw his chance, and sent his tanks against the bridgehead, forcing the Imperial troops to retire with heavy losses.

Thus all the heroism of British and Indian soldiers at the Mareth Line was apparently brought to nought. Yet they had pinned down important enemy forces, while the left hook had found its mark.

Could the 4th Indian Division by any means find another path across the mountains and join in the tank battle near Gabès, which was now imminent? The attempt was made, and came within a hair's breadth of complete success. A road was found, and the way was forced with the greatest skill and courage. Unfortunately, however, having reached the northern limit of the Matmata range, the division found that recent storms—the worst storms experienced for many years in Tunisia at this season—had washed away the last stretch of road leading to the plain.

With immense labour a bulldozer was coaxed along the tracks by which the division had come, while sappers and miners and Gurkhas formed living chains from a ravine near the obstruction, passing up rocks with which the roadway could be rebuilt. After eight hours' work five gaps were bridged, and on the afternoon of March 28th the way was clear.

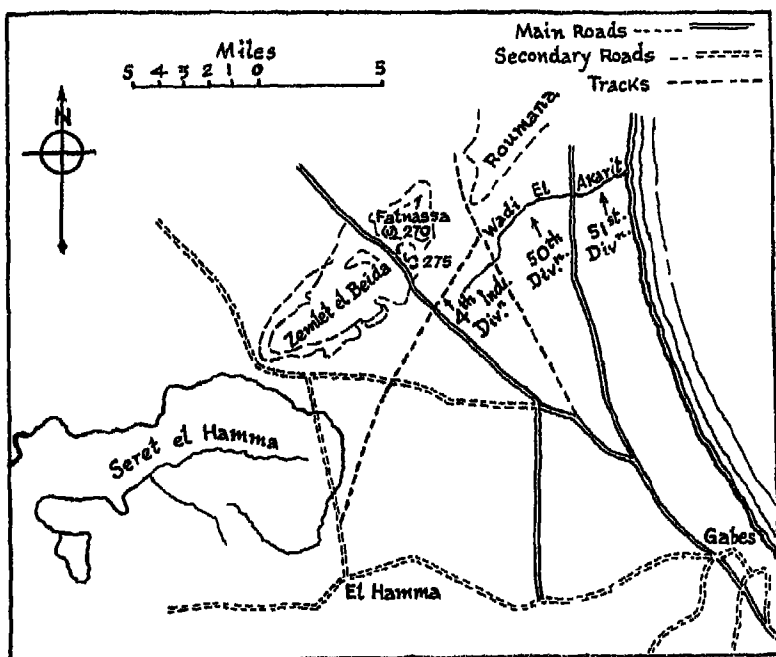
Down came the division into the Gabès plain, where New Zealand patrols were met. The tank battle had been fought and won. The Mareth Line had been carried. Imperial troops were in Gabès, and Rommel had withdrawn to the north in good order, though with depleted forces.

Although the 4th Division arrived too late for the Gabès fight, its dash across the Matmatas had proved its superlative skill in mountaineering. For the remainder of the campaign,

whenever such country was encountered, it had the honour of leading the attack.

### WADI AKARIT

Rommel was at bay during the last days of March, 1943, but by no means broken; indeed, he was in some respects better off than he had been at El Alamein, for he was now close to his supplies and to von Arnim's well-found army.



WADI AKARIT.

Things had not been going well for the Allies in Tunisia. The small British First Army had been driven back from Sejenane in the north, and the Americans, operating from Gafsa, had not been able to penetrate the valley at El Guettar, which would have enabled them to link up with the British Eighth Army, now driving north from Gabès.

Twenty miles north of Gabès the Wadi Akarit runs inland for ten miles, forming an anti-tank ditch similar to the Zig Zaou. Two mountain groups, commanding the approaches, the

Romauna and Fatnassa, are linked together by lower foothills. Here Rommel stood.

On the night of April 5th Montgomery put in an attack with the 50th Northumbrian Division and 51st Highland Division, a few miles inland from the coast, while the 4th Indian Division were ordered to seize the Fatnassa height, and if possible advance from there to the rear of the Wadi Akarit position. A success here would be decisive for the coastal attack.

So difficult was the Fatnassa feature that the commander of the 4th Division decided to make a surprise attack by night, without artillery preparation, some hours before the Highlanders went forward. The 7th Brigade (Royal Sussex, 2nd Gurkhas, 16th Punjabis) were assigned to this objective, while the 5th Brigade (Essex, 6th Rajputana Rifles, 9th Gurkhas) was held in reserve, to exploit the ground gained by the 7th Brigade.

Both brigades moved forward as soon as darkness fell on April 5th. Conditions favoured surprise, for the new moon had set, and there was a slight mist. The 7th Brigade advanced about midnight, when a platoon of riflemen came upon an outpost of unsuspecting Germans. The sleeping sentry was beheaded. Advancing silently, with *kukris* drawn, they exterminated the outpost, but not before some of the victims gave the alarm. Now the hills blazed with mortar and machine-gun fire, inaccurate in the dark, but revealing enemy positions. On went the Gurkhas, spreading terror in their path.

A critical moment came in the early hours of the morning (April 6th) when the radio sets at battalion headquarters were destroyed by mortar fire. Recently, at the Regimental Training Centre of the 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles, I met the senior Gurkha officer of this battalion, and he told me the story of that night. He is Subedar Major Nar Bahadur Gurung, a thick-set heavy mountaineer. If ever I saw a born fighter, it is this man, and I am told he much resembles his friend and kinsman, Subedar Lal Bahadur Thapa, who later received the Victoria Cross from King George VI on this African soil he had helped to conquer.

Two companies of the Gurkhas were engaged in bitter fighting on the Fatnassa heights, and a third in a nearby valley. Contact was lost owing to the failure of the battalion radio sets, which had had a direct hit. Many British and Gurkha officers

were killed or wounded; but each junior leader knew his part in advance. Subedar Lal Bahadur Thapa led two sections of riflemen forward, through a narrow cleft in the hill, manned by the enemy at every crest and ridge. The first post was cut down with *kukris*. Through a hail of shot the Subedar went straight on (there was no room for any turning movement) and killed two men at the second redoubt with his revolver and two with his *kukri*. By now his two sections had been reduced to two men. Clambering up to the summit of the hill with his gallant couple he found another machine-gun nest, and killed all its occupants. He bore a charmed life, as did the rifleman and messenger who followed him, for the three of them came through unscathed.

Up went the success signal. Messengers returned to battalion headquarters. Communications were re-established and positions consolidated. Presently the 5th Indian Brigade passed through the 2nd Gurkhas.

At 8.45 a.m. the Divisional Commander signalled to Corps Headquarters: "We have bitten 6,000 yards out of the enemy's position. The gate is open. Turn your armour loose."

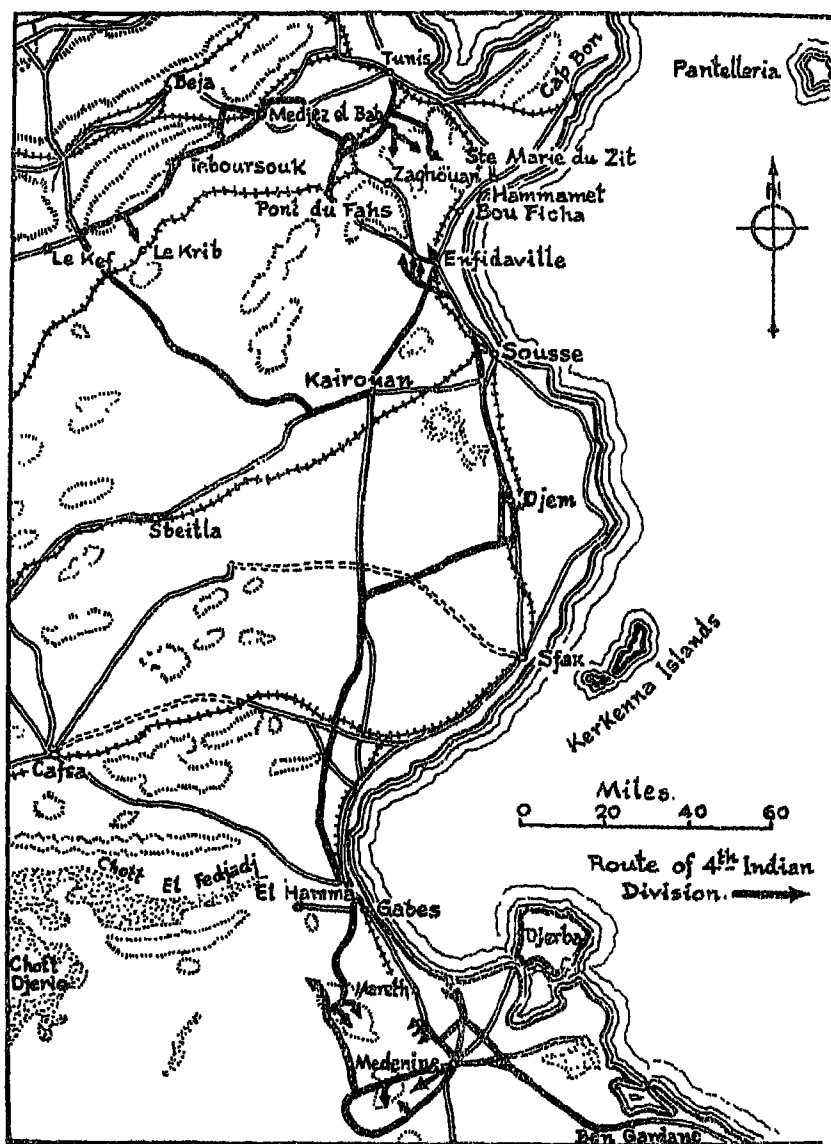
The Eighth Army swept northwards on the heels of Rommel. Sfax was entered on April 10th and Sousse on the 12th. A few days later it halted in the olive groves by Enfidaville.

A formidable array of hills confronted Montgomery's victorious but exhausted troops, stretching from the sea to Pont du Fahs. Behind this barrier the Afrika Korps was still in being, bruised and battered, yet being swiftly reconditioned from the ample resources of Tunis.

The Eighth Army had won many battles and surmounted many obstacles; nevertheless, the mountain range ahead proved impenetrable. An attempt to seize the crests was made on the night of April 19th-20th, when the 5th Brigade attacked Djebel Garci. The Essex cleared the lower features, the 6th Rajputana Rifles passing through them to the higher ground. This was one of the bloodiest battles ever fought by this gallant battalion, and doubtless did much to break the spirit of the Germans.

During the attack on the west, Havildar Major Chhelu Ram of the "Rajrif" led the men of his company forward after all its officers had been killed. Ammunition ran low. To husband it, Chhelu and his comrades threw rocks at the enemy to flush





ADVANCE THROUGH TUNISIA.

them out of their hiding-places; then they went in with the bayonet. He was mortally wounded and died fighting in the true Jat way.<sup>1</sup>

Djebel Garci was taken, and held for three days with powerful artillery support; but no break-through was possible with the man-power at the disposal of the Eighth Army. Montgomery has never sent his troops into an attack which cannot be fully supported, so other plans were discussed for the break-through. Sir Harold Alexander flew over to Enfidaville on April 30th, when decisions were made and executed with the speed and precision for which the Eighth Army is famous.

Within four hours of orders being issued, an outflanking column had embussed, and was driving through the night to another part of the line. The Germans feared Montgomery, and had massed their defences near Enfidaville; but now the 4th Indian Division and a Guards' Brigade were on their way south and west, by Kairouan and Sbeitla, and thence north to Teboursouk, moving unseen for two hundred miles, to join the First Army in Central Tunisia. The main punch was to be delivered at Medjez el Bab.

The outflanking force arrived at its assembly point on the afternoon of May 1st. The next four days were spent in preparations for the assault, in which aircraft and artillery were to be used on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

The plan was to attack along the road leading from Medjez el Bab to Tunis. Two divisions of the First Army were allocated to the north side of the road, and two divisions of the Eighth Army to the south side. The front was only some two miles wide. After it had been thoroughly softened the infantry would seize the anti-tank positions on the heights above the road; and the tanks would follow through into the Tunis plain.

At 9 p.m. on the evening of May 5th the 5th Brigade of the 4th Indian Division left its assembly area, the 9th Gurkhas leading, followed by the 6th Rajputana Rifles and the Essex. The 7th Brigade was to exploit the ground won by the 5th. A regiment of Churchill tanks and a company of sappers and miners were attached to each brigade. An elaborate link-up had been made with aircraft and artillery groups, so that the division could ask the guns to put down eight tons of shells a minute

<sup>1</sup> Chhelu Ram was awarded a posthumous V.C., the second to be given to the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles.

upon any selected area; it was also connected by special tentacle with twenty squadrons of bombers.

All went well on both sides of the road. Our infantry was supported by a gun on every seven yards of its front. All the first objectives were captured. The Germans put up a wild barrage, which fell far behind the Gurkhas, racing uphill on the south of the road.

The Rajputana Rifles moved through the Gurkhas with the precision of a machine; and the Essex exploited their gains with equal speed, although night still hung over the valley. This last battle in North Africa was like a set-piece, to show what well-disciplined troops can do in darkness.

British and American bombers arrived with morning light, escorted by their fighter-cover. A thousand sorties had been flown by 9 a.m. on May 6th. By this time the defences guarding the entrance to the plain had been pulverised, and were now held by British and Indian troops, on both sides of the road. Tanks roared through to Tunis.

\* \* \*

The end of the campaign was in sight, and the end of a long journey for the 4th Indian Division, which had travelled 1,600 miles—further than from London to Moscow—since the battle of El Alamein. And before that, what marches and counter-marches it had seen, in the Western Desert, Eritrea, Syria! It was right that they should have a place of honour in the battle which saw the death of the Afrika Korps.

\* \* \*

The *blitzkrieg* which staggered the Germans during the next six days is the story of the Armoured Divisions, who took Tunis and all the Cape Bon Peninsula. It should be recorded, however, that on the morning of May 12th the Colonel of the 2nd Gurkhas, climbing a hill near St. Marie du Zit, saw below him a German staff car with a white flag. He descended, accompanied by an orderly with a tommy-gun, and found nearly a thousand Germans forming up on parade. They were smart, shaven, clean. Walking by these glistening ranks he came to a caravan, where he was informed that General von Arnim had already sent one of his officers to arrange for the surrender of

the whole German staff. Presently General von Arnim was driven to British Headquarters with a Gurkha escort.

\* \* \*

The African campaign was at an end, and Indian troops were to play their part in the great amphibian operations of 1943.

In the grim, abortive battles for Cassino in February and March, 1944, the 4th Indian Division added to its great reputation; some battalions were in the snow and slush of that dreadful winter for two and a half months without relief, and, although they never won the guerdon of their valour, they wore down and depleted some of the best units of the German Army. Under present circumstances the material is not available to enable me to do justice to these gallant troops, but I shall take up the story in the concluding chapters, when I was myself with Indian troops in Italy.

## V

### *Royal Indian Navy*

**I**NDIA'S navy existed long before the British arrived on the scene, indeed long before recorded history; and as far as it concerns the British it is the Senior Service, for it was formed at Surat, in 1612, with a fleet of four armed ships which defeated the Portuguese at the battle of Swalley Roads. Until 1686 it was called the Honourable East India Company's Marine.

When the H.E.I.C. acquired Bombay in 1665, its Marine established itself in the castle there, which, according to a contemporary chronicle, was "a pretty, neat, regular fortification, well governed, well gunned, well manned and well disciplined: the strongest hold our nation are masters of in India."

After a century of warfare against the Dutch and Portuguese for supremacy of the west coast, the contest was decided in the British favour. Thereupon the fleet sought further victories in more distant seas. In 1744 it voyaged round Cape Cormorin to take part in the capture of Chandernagore from the French, to Egypt in 1801 for the campaign under Sir Ralph Abercrombie, to Mauritius in 1810, to Java in 1811, to Burma in 1824, to the Somali coast in 1827, Aden in 1834, China in 1840, New Zealand in 1845, Burma in 1852, the Persian Gulf in 1855, China again in 1860 and 1900, the Red Sea in 1871, 1882, 1885, South Africa in 1899, and the first world war of 1914-1918.

In addition to these foreign travels, the Bombay Marine took its share in most of the local wars in India: against the Mahrattas in 1774 and 1817, the Arabs in 1821 and 1835, the Burmese in 1824, 1852, 1885 and 1889, the occupation of Karachi in the 1838 Afghan War, and of Hyderabad in the Scinde War of 1843, in the siege of Multan in 1848, and in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, when Indian naval brigades were stationed in Maharashta, Bengal and Assam.

From 1830 onwards India's naval forces were named the Royal Indian Marine. By then Bombay had a century-old and flourishing shipbuilding industry, 115 men-of-war and 144 merchant vessels having been constructed there. (Several frigates

serving under Nelson at the battle of Copenhagen were Bombay-built.) With the coming of steam, however, the industry waned; to be revived into full vigour, however, during the present war.

About the year 1863 India possessed 13 steamers, 7 sailing ships, 11 transports, and the Indus Flotilla of 17 gunboats. Thereafter the Marine fell on evil days, and virtually ceased to exist except for trooping and Trinity House work.

Many were the projects of reorganisation discussed, recommended, and then rejected owing to financial stringency. In 1922 a patriotic and plain-spoken sailor, Rear-Admiral H. L. Mawbey, resigned from the directorship of the R.I.M. as a protest against the refusal of the Government of India to transform the service into the Royal Indian Navy and equip it properly.

In 1934 a beginning was made, but in 1939 the R.I.N. possessed only seven small ships. Seven small ships and a five-year plan for expansion.

Expansion was rapid after 1940. The five-year plan was telescoped into one year, doubled, quadrupled, and yet further extended. Merchant vessels were requisitioned by the score. Orders for new sloops and escort vessels were placed in England and Australia by the dozen. Yards in Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta were crowded with new keels. Would that I could give the actual figures. In their absence, I would comment on the nation-wide popularity which the Royal Indian Navy is achieving. It is most remarkable how Indians are taking to the sea. Go where you will in the Punjab, where a few years ago the villagers had hardly heard of ships, and you will now find families with a son in the Navy. It is the same elsewhere. I have met Indian bluejackets not only in great inland centres such as Jhelum and Lahore, but in remote hamlets close to the Afghan border, and on the fir-clad slopes of the Himalayas.

\* \* \*

Until recently the main source of recruits was the Ratnagiri district in the Bombay Presidency, where there is a fine type of seaman manning the high-pooped dhows employed in the coastal trade. But to reef a dhow in a squall (skilled labour though it be) is an accomplishment of little value in a man-of-war; moreover, Ratnagiri is a small district, and the need today

is for thousands of electricians, signalmen, artificers and gunners.

At present the R.I.N. contains 62 per cent. of British officers and 38 per cent. of Indian officers, but the proportion of the latter will greatly increase as soon as the difficulties of training are surmounted. Almost everyone speaks English, or is learning to speak it. The languages of the lower deck are indeed Babel—Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kanarese and Punjabi—but through them all runs the tongue of Shakespeare and the terms of endearment of the British sailor.

\* \* \*

Why is it that the R.I.N. has become so popular in recent years? The answer is not far to seek. It has acquired prestige not only because British naval officers know their business as no others on the Seven Seas, but because Indians have emulated their comrades and won their admiration and respect.

Meet a young Bengali lieutenant-commander of the engineer branch, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for preventing an Italian ship from scuttling herself in the Persian Gulf. His name is Daya Shankar. To track him down was a task of some difficulty, and to make him talk was even harder. However, here is his story as I dragged it out of him bit by bit:

"When our forces entered Persia," he said, "in the summer of 1941, my ship and some others were ordered to go up the Khor Musa—an inlet of the Persian Gulf, near Abadan—to land troops and seize any Axis shipping we found.

"August 25th was a very dark night. Dawn was just breaking when we came alongside the jetty and took the place over. Surprise was complete, and there were no casualties. But we couldn't stop the Axis ships from setting themselves on fire. No doubt they had made preparations long before.

"They worked quick, but we were quick too. There were five German and three Italian ships at anchor, and we had boarded them by 4.30 a.m. I was detailed to board the *Caboto* with a party of five men. She was an Italian cargo-ship of about 5,000 tons. Maskell came along to see the show. He was our navigating lieutenant.

"Some of the crew were already on the fo'c'sle deck, while others were still hanging about. They had poured kerosene

over the living quarters and set them alight. Bottles of Persian beer kept popping in the saloon, for the heat was terrific. We drove everyone for'ard; and while we were doing this I heard several explosions between decks, where they had put charges of dynamite to sink her.

"After we had got the crew for'ard Maskell was recalled to do some job on our ship, but he came back after about twenty minutes. By now the flames had taken hold so strongly on deck that he couldn't pass that way. So he looked round for another way, and found a passage leading to the bow, right under the engine-room."

"Please go back a little," I said. "You boarded the ship. What did the Italians do?"

"They weren't too pleased. I had a pistol and the ratings tommy-guns."

"Indian ratings?"

"Yes. We lined up the crew on the fo'c'sle by the galley. There was the master, and the mate, and the engineer, and a crew of thirteen or fourteen: I hadn't time to count them carefully. One funny thing I noticed was that in the forehold someone had chalked up in English, 'To hell with Mussolini!'

"Well, the master was a Fascist. He was very pro-Duce and refused to co-operate. In fact, he was such a bad example to the crew that I put him in the paint locker and turned the key. I couldn't spare a guard to look after him.

"After this the other chaps became quite reasonable. The engineer spoke English, and he said the mate would show us where the rest of the dynamite was.

"I asked the mate, and he said that the rest of the dynamite was near some naphtha barrels in the hold. I hadn't known about the naphtha till then. I told the mate to show me the way to it.

"He refused. He said there was no way back now, and anyhow it was too dangerous. We were arguing about it when Maskell returned; of course, he knew the way back, for he had just come by it. It was a passage for working coal. If there's any credit in this job it is due to him. So I induced the mate to come with us."

"Induced?"

"I put my pistol into his back. He didn't give much trouble, as a matter of fact. Once he'd started he thought it was better



to move quick. Maskell came with me and brought the engineer along also.

"I forgot to say that just before this I had organised our ratings and the Italian crew as a fire-party. The Eycies worked very well, making a chain of buckets from the sea to the fire, because by now they weren't any keener than we were to be blown up with the *Caboto*. I had signalled for a fire-engine, but one couldn't be spared at the moment.

"Well, we went along that passage. It was narrow, and dark, and damned hot by this time. I was very glad when we got to the first fuse."

"I suppose you might all have gone sky-high at any moment?"

"It wasn't very likely just then," said Shankar modestly. "But, of course, anything *might* have happened. As a matter of fact, the fuses had all failed. They were each about twenty feet long, giving ten minutes' burning time.

"Well, we came to the second and third fuses, which had also failed to burn, and that was all. We took out the detonators and threw the dynamite overboard. Provided we could put out the fire on deck, the *Caboto* would be safe."

"And was it?"

"Yes, they sent us a fire-engine a bit later. Even so it took several hours to get the flames under control. But you aren't going to write all this, are you? It was really quite a small show."

True it is that the R.I.N. has fought sterner battles than this. Yet on that August morning in the Khor Musa many gallant deeds were done. Seven of the eight enemy ships were saved. In addition to Lieut.-Commander Shankar, Sub-Lieutenant Nilkanta Krishnan received a D.S.C. for capturing a tug undamaged (he fought a pistol duel with its master and shot him dead), while three Indian ratings received the Distinguished Service Medal.

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Another example of the spirit of the R.I.N. is the fight of H.M.I.S. *Bengal* in the lonely spaces of the Indian Ocean a thousand miles south-west of Java. In some respects it ranks with the glorious exploit of the *Rawalpindi* in the North Sea, but it has a happier ending.

*Bengal* is a 1,000-ton Australian-built vessel mounting a single 12-pounder gun. On November 11th, 1942, she was escorting to Bombay the 6,000-ton motor tanker *Ondina* when two Japanese raiders came in sight. They were heavily armed merchantmen of 10,000 and 6,000 tons, each mounting six 5.5-inch guns—twelve guns firing shells six times the weight of *Bengal's* 12-pounder.

Against such odds nothing but audacity could avail. Increasing to full speed, *Bengal* engaged the enemy as closely as possible.

Firing began at a two-mile range. *Bengal* was hard put to it to compete with the four-gun broadsides of the Japanese. She twisted and turned with the greatest skill, and kept up her fire with such good effect that she scored a hit on the big raider's aft ammunition magazine. By now range had shortened to 2,500 yards.

With great courage the master of *Ondina* had chosen to accompany *Bengal* rather than seek safety by escaping, as he might have done, for oil ships have no place in battle. He was killed early in the fight, and all the *Ondina's* ammunition was expended, so the crew abandoned ship. *Bengal* fought on.

Suddenly the big raider blew up and sank by the stern. Her companion closed in to pick up the survivors. Thereupon *Bengal* put up a smoke screen and drew off; she had hardly any ammunition left.

*Ondina* was not as badly damaged as the crew had at first thought (there is not much time for thinking when a tanker is on fire), and now that help was at hand they returned to the vessel and managed to get her under way. So *Bengal* and *Ondina* limped on across the Indian Ocean, feeling they had done a good morning's work.

I met one of the gun crew of seven who manned *Bengal's* famous 12-pounder. He is Leading Seaman Ismail Muhammad, a handsome, simple, straightforward boy.

He was "No. 3," the loader. Well, he loaded. The sixth round hit the enemy's aft magazine. "That's all," he said in a slow, soft voice.

"What happened afterwards?" I asked. In Colombo, he told me, they were met by a band. And in Bombay there was a big reception, and they marched through cheering streets. Now he had the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, and Mr. Simon

Elwes was painting his portrait. The Navy was a grand life, but he would never get promotion, he said, for he had no head for books. Thus might have spoken Loti's *mon frère Yves*.

\* \* \*

H.M.I.S. *Machlinar* is a pretty palm-studded settlement near Bombay where ratings are trained in detecting submarines. It is the largest establishment of its kind outside the United Kingdom.

The attack teacher there must surely be the most extraordinary machine in the world, for it simulates all the conditions of submarine hunting except the actual launching of the depth-charges, and of the feelings of the submerged crew waiting for deliverance or doom.

You have in one room the hunters—that is, the men on the bridge, whose instruments tell them where the quarry is lurking and whether it is advancing, retreating, or crossing the ship's path. In another room, on a glass-topped table, we follow the movements of the hunted.

Sounds are heard—sounds which in reality would come through fathoms of sea—and the ear of the hunter discovers its prey. The submarine is located. Orders are given to engine-room and helmsman. Are the calculations right? Watch the hunt. The ship alters course—starboard ten, starboard twenty-five, port five, now—*now*—a signal flashes, to mark the point where the depth-charges would have been shot overboard.

On the glass-topped table the tracks of submarine and destroyer are displayed. We can see exactly whether or not the attack would have been successful.

Much depends on the teamwork of the hunters, as also on the skill of the individuals making the observations. Skill and teamwork come only with practice. The human factor cannot be eliminated, which is to say that all the fabulous complex of electric and explosive devices which finds and destroys an invisible submarine depends on the trained eyes and ears and the cool heads of a group of men working as one.

An extraordinary machine, and so, indeed, is the whole of a warship in action, with its calculators, range-finders, predictors, stabilisers, and death-dealing weapons, linked together like the parts of a body. The hand that strikes a foe does not itself see

him, any more than the men behind the weapons on a man-of-war see the enemy; they carry out orders from a remote control. As nerves to the body, so are communications to the fighting ship.

\* \* \*

All branches of the modern science of communications are taught at the Signal School at Colaba, where I attended divisions and watched the march past of a thousand young men. These lads become experts in all the latest and most marvellous refinements of radio-telephony, but I confess I was more interested in the pigeon lofts.

The Colaba carrier pigeons fascinated me. Some of them had been flying ever since the Sicily landings. What sights these veterans must have seen, with their curious cornelian eyes, and what fateful messages some of them must have carried!

At the time of my visit they were flying round Colaba, taking their morning exercise. Every now and then a flight of them (or is it a covey?) would swoop down to their lofts, with a simultaneous banking turn, showing a glimmer of white underwing against the morning sun, hoping to enjoy their lunch in peace, but their keeper, a dignified little man, with a thin beard, like some pigeon-fancier in a Moghul miniature, would shoo them off with a grunt. Just as troops are toughened, so these Royal Indian pigeons must carry out aerial route marches to strengthen their flying muscles. Left to themselves, the keeper said, they would become absorbed in domestic affairs, being exceedingly affectionate by nature. Yet certainly it is this uxorious disposition which sustains them in their long flights, as was evident from the billing and cooing in the lofts when at last their parade was over.

How much do we really know about these birds in spite of all the fanciers of this and past ages? No one has yet told us how they find their way across the trackless sky—in a fog, for instance—though the problem has been studied by Vedic seers, Greeks, Great Moghuls, Renaissance Princes, and eminent scientists of every age. Vision alone cannot lead them back. A Russian doctor, Lokhovsky, has discovered that the presence of a radio-transmitting station will cause them to lose their sense of direction. Yet they do possess keen sight, and use it, for I was told in Bombay that when they are sent out with patrol vessels at sea they will continuously improve on the speed of

their return flight, as they become better acquainted with the landfall.

Young birds are afraid of the hinged bars of the door of their loft, which will not open in the reverse direction. They have to be tempted to enter with a handful of their favourite seed. The device is necessary because the bars are connected with an electric bell, ringing in the keeper's quarters, so that he may be warned of a returning pigeon at any time of the day or night.

Each bird has a little coloured anklet on its left foot serving as identity disc. On the other foot is clipped the tiny aluminium cylinder bearing the service message. There is space for sixty words on the form. Casualties are few, but there is a hospital for them, in case they are wounded by hawks or gunfire. They receive a daily dose of Norwegian cod-liver oil; and stimulants and massage after a long flight.

\* \* \*

In Bombay there is another stone frigate like the *Machlimar*, which carries on the traditions of the Navy in their full vigour. Once the house of a Sassoon, H.M.I.S. *Feroze* is now a training centre for 150 officer-cadets, Indian and British.

What a full and varied career lies before a naval cadet, touching life at a thousand points! There is nothing like it, I think, in any other profession.

In the *Feroze* much more is taught than seamanship, navigation, communications, submarine-attack, torpedo and gunnery: everything comprised under "general knowledge" comes within its ambit. The officers are drawn from all parts of the British Empire: I met Englishmen, Canadians, an Australian, the son of a merchant I knew in Bannu, the disciple of a pundit at whose feet I had sat in Gorakhpur, Parsis, Madrassis, Bengalis and many Punjabis. One of the recent pupils was Ganendra Singh, brother to the present Maharajah of Patiala. In spite of the regal surroundings of his childhood, he took to naval life with the greatest zest, sleeping double-banked with his fellow-snotties. He is now a lieutenant, commanding a small mine-sweeper.

In Great Britain the sea is in our nostrils, and we could not live without it. Not so in India. Yet the adventure has called to youth, and will call in increasing measure as the trade of India increases. For two years now the gunboats and motor-launches

on the Arakan coast, often commanded by Indians, and always manned by Indian crews, have been harrying the enemy day and night, and co-operating with the forward troops in the creeks and estuaries of the peninsula. Already their operations range far beyond Akyab. Soon they will share in larger enterprises.

It requires no prophet to anticipate the time when the Allied nations will fill the ports of India with enormous fleets. When that day comes the R.I.N. will be second to none in devotion to duty and gallant enterprise.

## VI

### *Indian Air Force*

**W**HEN war broke out a dozen pilots and a dozen Wapitis constituted the flying strength of the Indian Air Force. The ground staff numbered 180.

Although the machines were elderly and obsolescent, the pilots were young, well trained and experienced in frontier flying. Flying Officer Majumdar (now a wing-commander with the Distinguished Flying Cross) had commanded a flight in Miranshah. Pilot Officer Engineer (now a wing-commander and D.F.C.) had flown from India to England and back in a Tiger Moth, winning the Aga Khan prize for the first Indian to fly to England. Pilot Officer Mukerji (now a wing-commander) was the nephew of the well-known Mukerji who had joined the R.F.C. in the last war, and won the D.F.C.

At Cranwell, where the senior Indian pilots had been trained, an Indian cadet had captained the hockey team, and another the tennis team. They were good sportsmen and good airmen; but they were few.

On April 1st, 1933, these "veterans" were transferred from the R.A.F. to the Indian Air Force, and a single flight was formed at Karachi with all the pomp and circumstance of an Act of the Indian Legislative Assembly. It was, in fact, a notable decision to form a separate Indian air service, to be eventually manned and officered entirely by Indians.

This flight of 1933 went on active service in 1937 to the North-West Frontier, and was soon in action, supporting the endeavours of the Army to apprehend the elusive Fakir of Ipi. One of the pilots, Flying-Officer Mehar Singh, was brought down in his Wapiti by a bullet through his petrol tank, and made a safe forced landing in a rocky valley with a full load of bombs. A Sikh thus stranded in those regions could expect no mercy from the fanatical tribesmen of Miranshah; but he succeeded in hiding in a cave, and eventually found his way back to a post manned by Tochi Scouts. Twenty-four hours later he was patrolling the same valley.

In 1938 another I.A.F. flight was added to the first, and in 1939 all British officers were withdrawn from the squadron, to which a third flight was added at the end of the year, Squadron Leader Mukerji becoming its Commanding Officer.

Small though the I.A.F. was at the outbreak of this war, it took an active part in the defence of its native land, patrolling the North-West Frontier, and forming (in 1940) five Volunteer Reserve Flights in Karachi, Bombay, Cochin, Madras and Calcutta, which took over from the R.A.F. the aerial defence of 3,000 miles of coast.

Late in December, 1941, No. 1 Squadron of the I.A.F. (consisting of 13 Lysanders) was ordered to Burma under the command of Squadron Leader Majumdar, and gave fine service to the hard-pressed British and Chinese forces up to the last moment. Although no match for the faster Japanese fighters, the Lysanders developed a technique of tree-top flying which made them practically invisible against the dark background of forest, enabling them to carry out important reconnaissances.

Now they have returned to the Burma front, not with one squadron, but with many, and not with slow "Lizzies," but with Vengeance dive-bombers and cannon-firing Hurricanes.

\* \* \*

The Link Trainer is a well-known robot, but I make no apologies for descanting on its charm.

We are at a Flying Training School at Ambala, in a cool, quiet room. An Indian student sits in a 'plane cockpit—just like a real one—learning night-flying by beam.

The cockpit is hooded, so the student sees nothing except the phosphorescent dials of his instrument-board, showing him his horizon, air speed, altitude, rate of rise or fall, and degree of turn. Every movement of his control lever, or rudder, and every adjustment of his throttle, is shown on his instruments, as if he were flying, and also on the similar instruments on the instructor's table. The telephone over his ear gives him a continuous humming note if he is on his right course; and a dot—dot—dot if he is to the right, and a dash—dash—dash if to the left.

On the instructor's table there is a gadget on wheels, with a self-inking pen, which traces out the path the 'plane would take if it were flying.

The student's task this morning is to fly along a beam to an



aerodrome, and land. He can see nothing, remember, except his instruments. On the instructor's map two concentric circles are marked. Their centre is the spot where the 'plane should land, and where their circumferences intersect the beam are the points at which the student, if he is making a correct landing, should be at an altitude of 600 feet and 100 feet respectively; they are called outer-marker-beacon and inner-marker-beacon.

The student's line strays a little, now right, now left. Sometimes the instructor telephones advice: "Rev. up a bit," or "You're flying left wing down."

Now the student is passing over the aerodrome to get his bearings. The instructor signals "Engines over." On he goes for a minute, then banks round and edges his way into the beam again. Now he is making his approach.

He is not coming down quite fast enough, for he passes the outer-marker-beacon at 800 feet. Recognising his error he puts the 'plane's nose down sharply, then pulls up into a stall. This is the most difficult operation in flying: to land by beam in the dark.

Men trained in the Link have taken aeroplanes up by night without any previous experience of flying, and have made successful landings. This seems hardly credible, but it is a fact. How greatly would mankind benefit if its political leaders could be trained in this manner, instead of by the hit-or-miss methods of the hustings. Politics are an adventure in the dark, more dangerous than night-flying.

\* \* \*

At an operational training unit of the I.A.F. in Peshawar a Vengeance dive-bomber flight is at work.

With a glitter of his steel bracelet a Sikh pilot waves away the ground crew and taxis down the aerodrome. He is "Green Formation Leader," and is followed by three other Vengeances piloted by a Punjabi, a Parsi, and a Pathan.

Each Vengeance has four small bombs under its belly: practice 8-pounders, with a charge of stannic chloride, which gives a puff of white smoke, enabling the instructor to locate the hit.

Up they go, climbing fast, and are soon lost to view. But not to the radio-telephone. Green Formation Leader is asking each member of his team whether he is O.K.?

Meanwhile, quicker than car can carry us, let us transfer our-

selves in imagination to the bombing range. (Sentries try to keep it clear of little boys looking for shell cases, but Pathan children are born disobedient and elusive: they creep up shallow watercourses and pounce on any metal they can find. One poor boy was killed recently, without deterring the others.) A white circle, fifteen yards in diameter, marks the target.

We are standing about a thousand yards away, by a control group consisting of a sergeant and two radio telephonists. The sergeant has a quadrant, with which to take a bearing on the hits. Another party is posted to our flank, also with a quadrant: the two bearings give the location of the bombs.

The telephonist takes up his microphone and speaks to the invisible bombers: "Range Control calling. Are you receiving me? Are you receiving me?" The answer comes: "Green Formation leader calling. Am receiving you loud and clear, loud and clear."

A few minutes pass before the Vengeances are audible, then visible. "Range Control calling," says the telephonist. "Are you ready? Are you ready?"

"Green Formation Leader calling. Have I permission to bomb?"

"You have permission to bomb."

All this is very ordinary routine to the control group. But how amazing and marvellous it is to be chatting to men flashing through the sky at 300 miles an hour, three miles above us.

Green Formation Leader is getting ready to attack. He banks round in a tight turn, the nose of his plane on the target. (More accurately, the leading edge of his right wing, just where it joins the fuselage.) His height is now 12,000 feet.

His right hand is on the stick, his left on the throttle, with thumb on the bomb-firing switch, more familiarly known as "the tit."

As he dives he puts out his dive-brakes (opens out the flaps in the trailing edge of his wings to retard his speed) and engages the selector switch, which causes a white light to glow on his instrument board, showing him that his bomb circuit is live.

He is diving at 340 miles an hour, eyes on target, which creeps up to the leading-edge of his right wing.

Just when he has lost sight of it (not before) he presses the button, and his bomb shoots down. Simultaneously he pulls

out of his diving angle and turns away to gain height for another attack.

"It's quite easy when you know how," says the Chief Flying Instructor.

Yes, but these boys don't know how. The correct angle is 80 degrees. Almost vertical, but not quite. No. 3 is diving too steep, too steep! He's flying into the ground.

It really *was* an ugly moment. One wants nerves of steel to watch such things happening. He saved himself just when a crash seemed certain: the margin of error is small when one is moving at 180 yards a second.

Well, that's over, and the formation is gaining height again.

Dive-bombing demands the acme of physical fitness to avoid a black-out owing to the sudden variations in atmospheric pressure and the stresses of centrifugal force.

\* \* \*

Before the final stages of instruction all pilots and crews who fly in fast 'planes are tested in a decompression chamber. This is a sealed room provided with plate-glass windows through which the doctor can view his patients, also with oxygen apparatus for each individual, and with individual telephones to the doctor. Air can be quickly removed from the room to simulate the effect of going up in an aeroplane, or pumped back as if descending.

The decompression chamber which I visited was occupied by three young Indians who looked extremely uncomfortable.

The altitude meter registered the super-Himalayan height of 28,000 feet. "Have you done everything I told you?" the doctor asked Jit Singh on the telephone. "Have you blown your nose?"—"Yes, sir."—"Well, you're coming down now."

Each man had a writing-pad on his knees. "They are signing their names or trying to do sums," the doctor explained. "You'll see the results when we let them out."

"Stand by," he said into the 'phone; "I'm going to bring you lads down fast."

Over flicked the needle to the 10,000-feet mark. "How about your ears now?" he asked Jit Singh.—"All right, thank you, sir."

The doctor shook his head. "We never let anyone fly who

has any bronchial trouble," he told me, "and I'm afraid Jit Singh won't do. He looks to me cyanosed."

When he had brought them down to atmospheric pressure and the door was opened the trio came out with their writing-pads. They had been doing addition sums very nicely up to about 15,000 feet. After that Jit Singh had given up the attempt, relapsing into scribbles. The others had signed their names, distinctly at first, but with increasing weariness.

I wonder what Yogis, some of whom know so much about breathing, would make of a decompression chamber? The Vedic sages were studying the relation between the mind and the lungs two thousand years ago.

"Would you like to go in now?" asks the doctor.

I said I had another appointment, which was the truth, but not the whole truth.

\* \* \*

Next day, flying over the Kohat Pass, I looked down on country that held many memories of boyhood. Memories of a day when a decompression chamber would doubtless have been a delight! And how I would have liked to stop in the Afridi country, just below us, across the British border, where my friend Naim Shah lived! He is dead, alas! but his line continues with four sons and two daughters . . . over there in those towers which mark the site of Kui.

By the road leading down to Kohat, outside British jurisdiction, there used to be established an arms factory, which turned out a very decent imitation of our .303 rifle. It has gone, since the war began, but not into hiding. It has come across the border, and the workers are now busily engaged in turning out weapons for the British.

\* \* \*

Wing-Commander Suboto Mukerji is commanding the R.A.F. station in Kohat, which includes British as well as Indian personnel—a total of some 50 officers and 1,000 men; there are two complete squadrons of the Indian Air Force, led by two Sikhs. It is one of the most important sectors of the air defences of the North-West Frontier.

Mukerji took me up to Miranshah in his old open two-seater Lysander. It was an exhilarating trip, with plenty of fresh air,

and I was amused to find that we completed a journey in an hour and a half—which used to take me at least sixteen hours by tonga.

Miranshah was much the same as when I knew it thirty-six years ago—before Mukerji was born—and there was my name in the visitors' book at the officers' mess, dated August, 1908.

The fort has been enlarged, and there is an aerodrome outside the inner defences; but the garrison of Tochi Scouts seemed to me the ghosts—hearty, well-nourished ghosts—of the men I knew. As to the Fakir of Ipi, who troubles the frontier today, he might well be the avatar of the Mullah Powindah, who used to escape across the Afghan border, five miles away, just as the present Fakir is always doing.

The Tochi Scouts are a force consisting of 120 officers and 3,500 men under the control of the Commandant of Frontier Constabulary, who has other scouts, levies and militias under his command, amounting to some 12,000 men. They do not belong to the Indian Army, but to the North-West Frontier Province, and keep order amidst half a million well-armed brigands. Many of the Frontier Constabulary officers are lent from the Indian Army, which enjoys the largest and most realistic school for hill fighting and guerrilla tactics in the world.

In the Bengal Lancers we thought we were quick off the mark after raiders, but the I.A.F. is far quicker. Mukerji showed me what happens. He pressed a button in his office and a hooter sounded. A party of men doubled out to the tarmac and started up the duty 'plane. Simultaneously the duty pilot came running to the office, with map and helmet and goggles.

If this had been the real thing he would have been briefed in half a minute, for a set of indexed maps and stacks of catalogued photographs are ready. All there is to do is to give him whatever information or orders have been received, and a map reference.

Off the pilot goes. The ground crew are holding his parachute harness ready; he slips it on and jumps in. The engine is already warmed up. Within three minutes of the alarm sounding (by Mukerji's stop-watch) the duty pilot was taxiing down the aerodrome.

Ten minutes later he might well be fifty miles away, shoot-

ing up raiders in his Hurricane or reporting on their movements.

\* \* \*

I should like to linger over fond memories of the Frontier, whose bleak hills pull at the heartstrings of all who have lived there, but we must away to other scenes.

At an air supply training centre, almost entirely manned by Indians, I learned how all the complicated needs of a modern army can be delivered by air, from malaria inoculations to mules.

It was started shortly after the fall of Rangoon (not at its present headquarters), and did excellent service in supplying the retreating troops and the refugees from Burma who were struggling to reach safety over difficult passes. It learned its lessons in a hard school, when much improvisation was necessary, and officers with experience of operations in the Pacific have contributed their knowledge. Much that has happened of late and more that will happen tomorrow in Burma is based on methods evolved at this centre.

Paratroops are being trained in large numbers in the neighbourhood. Chief instructors are as yet mostly British, but there are many Indian assistants and interpreters. All are chosen for their tact and sympathy. Suitable men are hard to find, and only about 15 per cent. of the British applicants offering themselves as instructors in India are able to pass the required tests.

One of the instructors was a burly Cockney flight-sergeant who had been in his time a professional footballer and a book-maker. Another was an Oxford graduate with honours in mediæval history. A third was a country solicitor.

Among the apparatus for the early lessons is a springboard, a slide, and a maypole. The first is for newly arrived recruits, who learn to jump off it correctly and how to roll over on the mat, keeping their elbows close and their heads down, like a steeplechase jockey when he falls. The slide teaches more or less the same lessons. The maypole is a shaft, round which students swing, as on flying horses at a fair, releasing themselves at an order from the instructor, so that they may learn to fall in any position. Anyone can see the difference between the way a recruit falls and the graceful tumble of an instructor.

Pupils are taken up for their first jump only after they have repeated every movement until it has become automatic. The

group I accompanied were not novices, but men about to jump for the fourth time, and due to receive their paratrooper's badge.

Twenty young Jats they were, seated in a big transport 'plane, each in his harness and crash helmet. The jumpmaster was a British flying officer with air gunner's badge. His is the nerve-racking task of seeing that the men leave the 'plane without a hitch.

The laden Dakota drones off. Well-remembered country glides below: the park and outskirts of Rawalpindi, narrow green fields, the Nicholson monument amidst the rocky foothills towards Taxila. He would have been proud to lead these boys!

Presently the pilot switches on the red light and the jumpmaster gives the order "Prepare for action!" Our target lies ahead: a white circle on the aerodrome.

The men form line along a hawser. On the command "Hook up!" they attach their harness, with the cry of "*Hanuman ji ki jai!*"—"Victory to Hanuman!" Their god has a monkey's face but a lion's heart, as the Jats have shown the world so many times!

Their leader, a havildar, takes up his position by the open door under the red light. It must be windy there. In fact, it is windy, for I creep over, hand over hand, to have a look. One might expect a shiver or gooseflesh with the gale blowing, but no, there is a light of triumph in his clear brown eyes. He is enjoying himself, this lad who was a peasant clad in grey homespun a year ago, and is now about to fling himself into space in the latest harness of war.

The jumpmaster's cap has fallen off and is vibrating slowly towards the open door.

Over the door the light has changed from red to green. The jumpmaster says "Go!"

One, two, three, they follow their leader. It is all over in a minute.

The jumpmaster has saved his cap. His knuckles are bleeding. And below us a group of white bubbles is swaying and swinging in the sunlight.

We bank round to watch the next group jump from the 'plane following us. Black dots emerge and are transformed into billowing parachutes.

Our fellows are landing. Now they are running together towards the havildar. Their troubles are over. "Some of these chaps are so confident," says the Cockney flight-sergeant, "that they carry the paratroop badge in their pockets, and we see them pinning it on while they are in mid-air."

The flight-sergeant has a deep scar below his knee. "Did you get that jumping?" I ask.

"No, sir, footballing. It's much more dangerous than parachuting."

I wonder? And I wonder what his pupils will be doing in a year's time?



## .VII

### *Indian State Forces*

**I**N the Chamber of Princes last autumn, when Lord Linlithgow made his farewell speech to that august assembly, I noticed one small but symptomatic change since I had last attended the ceremony in Lord Willingdon's time: the Princes no longer wore their jewels. All were plainly dressed, though many of them (for instance, the magnificent young Maharajah of Patiala, who stands six foot four) could not fail to look picturesque.

No jewels, because the Chamber is no longer a social meeting-place for Princes visiting Delhi, but a business-like body engaged in safeguarding the rights and promoting the welfare of their 93,189,233 subjects.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the Princes are in uniform. The Nawab of Bhopal is an Air-Commodore. He has two battalions of infantry overseas, also a motor transport company and a field ambulance, and another battalion ready for active service. Last year he sold all his American investments to pay for a squadron of Spitfires. The Maharajah of Gwalior, chief of the Mahrattas, has raised and trained more than 7,000 soldiers, many of whom are serving in Italy and Burma. The Maharajah of Jaipur, a handsome young Rajput, and one of the world's best polo players, holds a commission in the British Life Guards, but now commands his State troops. The Maharajah of Dewas, another Rajput, enlisted in a Mahratta regiment as a second lieutenant and served in Egypt, for he felt that the traditions of his house demanded that he should be actually in battle; now he is back, much against his inclination, at the urgent request of the Central Government, to serve as the Regent of a neighbouring Rajputana State.

Near me is one of the Commander-in-Chief's A.D.C.s, Captain Murteza Ali Khan, whose father, the Nawab of Rampur, is also here in uniform. Ranjitsinhji's nephew, the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, is in a formal black silk tunic and

<sup>1</sup> Out of the 562 independent States in India the rulers of only 134 sit in the Chamber.

white Rajput breeches, for he is the Chancellor of the Chamber,<sup>1</sup> and has been presenting his brother Princes to the Viceroy. Although he has no troops in the field, he has done much for the Royal Indian Navy in his State; and he is one of the leading statesmen of India.

Ranjitsinhji, realising the dangers of the luxury which so often surrounds the relations of an Oriental potentate, brought up his nephews in the hardy English tradition; and his wisdom was amply justified both in the present Jam Sahib and his brother, Colonel Himmatsinhji. Himmatsinhji holds an important post at Army Headquarters. He was Captain of the Public Schools Cricket Eleven in 1916, won the Singles Rackets Championship in the same year, and represented his school (Malvern) at football, fives, running and boxing. He joined the British Army as an Oxford cadet in 1917, and thereafter served in the Indian Army, until he became Military Attaché in Japan.

In 1938 he returned to the British Embassy in Tokyo, and was there when war was declared. Of his bearing in those days the British Ambassador wrote: "Major Himmatsinhji's sterling qualities came particularly to the fore during the eight months of the Embassy's incarceration. He was ready at all times to take a lead in work for the community, and the spirit of self-sacrifice he showed was an example to us all."

Many relatives of Rulers have distinguished themselves. There are dozens in the front line. Soon after war was declared the noble families of Rajputana improvised a training camp for themselves. Some of them arrived with their retainers, but sent them away when they saw what was afoot; they rolled up their sleeves, dug trenches, cooked, route-marched, and became hardened soldiers before the camp was abolished to give place to more regular training centres.

The senior Rulers support the war effort as enthusiastically as their juniors. His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, who rules a State of 16,399,000 inhabitants, has raised and equipped an army of some 8,000 men. He recently gave £170,000 for a corvette for the R.I.N., and a further large sum towards an R.A.F. bomber flight. His Highness the Maharajah of Kashmir possesses a well-found force of some 10,000 men,

<sup>1</sup> The Jam Saheb, having held the office for three years, has now been succeeded by the Nawab of Bhopal.

including a mountain battery which greatly distinguished itself in Syria. I was much impressed by one of his battalions, the Kashmir Rifles, which I saw in the Khyber Pass. It was commanded by a Moslem colonel and officered entirely by Indians and Gurkhas.

The Maharajahs of Travancore, Baroda, Mysore and Bhavnagar have made large donations to war funds. Eight Rulers (including Jaipur, who flies his own Moth) have given their private aeroplanes to the Indian Air Force.

On the day that war was declared the Indian Princes put themselves and all that they possessed at the disposal of the King-Emperor; and their subjects, who are as free to serve or not as any other Indian, came forward in their thousands to serve the Allied cause.

There are 250,000 States' subjects now under arms, and 16 battalions of States' Forces are on active service, as well as many transport, signal, and pioneer companies.

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The Mahratta State of Gwalior has made an exceptional effort in supplying men and materials for the war, following its old military tradition.

"If these stones could speak" is a feeling the traveller experiences in many parts of India, but never more acutely than when standing below the massive battlements of the fort at Gwalior. Here a Temple of the Sun was built in the night of history, and here came the Slave Kings from the north, and the Lodis, and the Moghuls, and here Man Singh (1485-1516) built his enchanting palace, the finest specimen of Hindu domestic architecture in India.

Man Singh is said to have fallen in love with a cow-girl of the low-caste Gujar tribe, a woman of enormous strength whom he saw wrestling with a buffalo. She consented to marry him only if he brought the water of the Tigra Lake fifteen miles away (where seaplanes now land) to a palace he must build her, a palace more magnificent than those of his other queens. So he built the palace, and a conduit from the lake, which stand to this day; and they lived happily ever after.

Near the capital, in the old British cantonment of Morar, there is an excellent and extensive training centre, for the troops of Gwalior and the neighbouring States. Here I found a

school for instructors, a training battalion 1,200 strong, a holding group of reinforcements, an artillery centre, a cavalry training centre, and a driving and maintenance centre: no small achievement for a State of some 4,000,000 inhabitants.

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His Highness Hamidullah Khan, Nawab of Bhopal, rules one of the prettiest and most charming principalities and the leading Moslem State in Central India. I had met the Nawab in Delhi when he and I were staying in the same house; in Bhopal he received in Indian dress, smoking a silver *hookah*.

It is difficult to convey the atmosphere of an Indian State, for it is so entirely unlike British India or anything we can imagine in Western countries.

Hereditary autocrats are popular in India. So much is beyond any honest dispute; and in my opinion, if you would see how the country will govern itself in days to come, you cannot neglect the Indian States, for they have endured for centuries, and have justified themselves by success:

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Next day I was present at a review held by the Commander-in-Chief when he inspected a Bhopal battalion ready to go overseas—the Gauhar-i-Taj's<sup>1</sup> Own Infantry. When the Nawab and General Auchinleck arrived the battalion was formed up on three sides of a square, drums were piled, cased colours laid on the drums. The leader of the Moslem community recited a chapter from the Holy Koran, the colours were presented, and the band played the "General Salute," while the colours were carried in slow time to the centre of the battalion. His Highness and the Commander-in-Chief returned to the saluting base; the battalion formed line, advanced in review order, halted, gave the royal salute, marched past in open column of companies.

Surveying all this from a hill-top, I thought of Buckingham Palace, where I had last seen a similar review. Here was a smartness equal to the Guards' Brigade.

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<sup>1</sup> Gauhar-i-Taj means Pearl of the Crown, one of the titles of Her Highness Abida Sultana, the heiress-apparent.

It is difficult to convey the atmosphere of Indian States, and I shall not attempt the task in a short chapter, but I would say this: we shall make a great mistake if we consider them backward merely because they are autocratic. India likes autocrats, without being in the least Fascist by temperament.

The majority of her ruling Princes are capable and popular. (There are exceptions, of course.) Their advice and experience will be invaluable to India when power passes into Indian hands, for they are a growth of the Indian soil, well rooted in the customs of the country. If you would see how India is likely to govern herself in days to come, go to the States with open mind, and open eyes.

## VIII

### *Women and Welfare*

OUT of the 187,972,229 women in India<sup>1</sup> there are as many Hindus as the total population of the United States, and as many Moslems as the total population of Great Britain. It is clear they are a factor we cannot neglect in considering the soldier's home life, but my knowledge may well be out of date, so I prefer to let two ladies speak for me.

It was in 1931, writes the wife of a distinguished officer in the Indian Army, who has kindly allowed me to use extracts from an article by her in a Service journal, that she first had an opportunity to visit the wives of the men enlisted in her husband's Punjabi-Moslem squadron. "As soon as possible I would leave the men chatting to my husband and ask permission to call upon the ladies of the household. This meant a climb up steep stairs to the comfortless domestic quarters. Here I would find a shy and flustered little group of women with their children, who gazed wide-eyed at the stranger. Sometimes the wife of our host was not only completely illiterate, but could speak no Urdu. As I knew no local dialect, I would find it rather a strain to be adequately animated by smile and gesture only during a visit that—for courtesy's sake—must last for not less than half an hour.

"At other houses the hostess, at least, could speak Urdu and we could get down at once to that all-absorbing topic—children.

"At one party I found my prestige was in some danger because our son is an only child. The conversation went something like this: 'Your Honour has only one child?'—'Yes, only one.'

"Chorus of exclamations as this surprising fact passed round the circle. 'She has only one child!'

<sup>1</sup> This figure is made up as follows: 123,837,290 Hindu women, 44,799,845 Moslems, 3,091,906 Christians, 2,549,037 Sikhs, 698,341 Jains, 56,642 Parsis, 112,335 Buddhists, 11,016 Jewesses, and 12,815,817 belonging to tribal religions or otherwise unclassified.

"I hastened to discuss their more numerous progeny and hoped that the subject was now turned.

"Children are of paramount importance, but most of these Jat women had passed beyond mere elementary pride in child-bearing. They could take a lively interest in the fact that their children were attending school and boasting of attainments far beyond their mothers' ken. They took some interest in other forms of progress and were anxious for better medical facilities than are at present available near their homes. All the same, it was sad to think how small must be their sphere of influence over a younger generation whose vision has passed so far beyond the mud village walls.

"This was what I felt when talking to the Dehra Dun cadets. The young men had come home from the Military Academy, where life is as full and as active as at Sandhurst, with interests as wide and recreations as stimulating. There they are better housed than many British officers in India, with sanitation, wireless, cinemas and other Western amenities. From this wider world they come to spend their leave in homes that have not changed much since the days of the Old Testament.

"In one Jat home alone did I meet a girl child who had upon her the stamp of India's future womanhood, and who was already completely free from the trammels of the *purdah* system. We had entered the usual guest chamber, together with our host, a retired honorary captain of a cavalry regiment. There were assembled the usual group of Indian officers, who had come from the neighbouring villages to greet us. With them stood a nine-year-old child, Gulab, the youngest daughter of the house. Her head was smooth as a seal, and her hair fell in two neat plaits over a clean print frock. There was humour in her wide and shapely mouth. There was intelligence in every line of her young face. Her eyes were wide and candid.

"Her father, who adored her, was having her educated at the Rohtak High School. She, too, was home for the Christmas holidays. She settled herself beside me and told me of her school life and her lessons, which included a course of housewifery. She talked of games, and the teachers, and of how, when she grew up, she would be a doctor. Her manners and her poise were perfect.

"Here, I feel sure, will some day be the answer to the marriage problem of one of those perplexed military cadets.

The enlightenment and the sophistication of Dehra Dun and a King's commission will find a match in Gulab of the sleek head and already wise but candid eyes."

Later the same lady wrote to me:

"I have been travelling by train for two nights and a day in the closest proximity with three Indian ladies and a child, together with all the luggage in Asia. The only thing they had not got in the carriage was the kitchen stove. One of the women was the wife of a staff captain taking her little girl to the south, where they will be near her husband. She has been educated at a fashionable girls' school, and was lip-sticked and nail-varnished. She said: 'My hubbie said, "You'll be bored in cantonments, so you'd better have a fortnight's holiday in Bombay first and have all the fun you want"' Well, she had taken him at his word, it seemed, and informed me that during her fortnight's visit she had been to the races or to the Taj every afternoon, and had seen twelve films. She was a nice girl, with her mind set on pleasure and naught else.

"The other two had just completed their military nurses' training in a hospital in Colaba; one was in a *sari*, the other in a shirt and slacks. They both smoked incessantly. They told me that 'the officers in our unit were very nice chaps, and we went out to parties nearly every night.' All three were Hindus, and when unable to procure curry from the dining car had it sent in from the Mahommedan refreshment stall. None of them, including the three-year-old child, ate anything else.

"It was an interesting and friendly trip. What struck me chiefly about these three young Army women was how quickly they had acquired the veneer of our ways and how nonchalant they were. No apparent depth, nor interest in war or any other problem, but complete freedom from *purdah* mentality or sex timidity."

I should explain that this letter was not written for publication, and certainly does not express my correspondent's full views on Indian womanhood: she was merely drawing a contrast between hopes and their fulfilment.

Emancipation of Indian women *may* come quickly. The leading Moslem and Hindu families in the Punjab (and indeed hundreds of other families all over India) have educated their daughters at schools where there is no *purdah*. The Begum Shah Nawaz tells me that girls whose parents hesitate to allow



them to enter mixed society are becoming Communists, in order to break down such restrictions. Nevertheless, conservative opinion is strong.

When Mr. Jinnah spoke recently to a Moslem college for women in Lahore, the students he addressed were sitting behind a curtain. The Punjab Moslem Students' Federation recently passed a resolution demanding a separate medical college for girls. Some learned doctors of Islam declare that strangers should address women only when they are veiled, quoting the Koran: "When ye ask aught of the wives of the Prophet, ask of them from behind a curtain. This is purer for your hearts and their hearts."

There are distinguished Indians in the forefront of affairs who consider women are being too quickly uprooted from immemorial customs. Advocates of *purdah* are not mere reactionaries: they desire the education of women in the arts, literature, medicine, etc., and that women should take part in all kinds of political, literary and sporting activities, but they do not wish them to do so in the company of men.

It is not for me or any Englishman to judge who is right, but it is well to remember that there are two points of view among Indians themselves.

The divergence of opinion is clearly evident in the recruiting for the Women's Auxiliary Corps (India). More than half the volunteers are British, Anglo-Indians, Christians and Burmese. Nevertheless I have seen some most enthusiastic Hindu and Moslem WAC(Is). At a headquarters in Lahore there were 90 girls on "General Service" terms (*i.e.*, liable to be sent to any part of India) and 370 on "Local Service." The former lived in a charming hostel, with an indefinably Indian touch about it: over many beds in the dormitory I saw crucifixes, and over some there were images of Parvati or Sarasvati, with votive offerings of marigolds.

Conditions of service are much the same as in Great Britain, except that no domestic work is done, owing to servants being available, and that few girls are taught to drive. There is a Naval Wing, which looks very smart in a uniform similar to that of the W.R.N.S. Doubtless the WAC(Is) are the beginning of a movement which will have a profound influence in India, but it is well to be clear that it is only a beginning.

This is well illustrated by some notes kindly sent me by a

well-known lady doctor, an honorary Welfare Officer in an Indian State. They paint a picture of home life in the countryside which no man could draw so well:

"The allotment which the ordinary soldier has been paying to his family," my friend writes, "is from £1 10s. to £1 17s. 6d. a month, though this is occasionally supplemented by a gift sent by money order from his place of abode. The State provides free education for the children of soldiers serving overseas, and all medical attention is furnished free by the Welfare Officer, and given during her visit.

"Day-by-day visiting has revealed that women all over the world exhibit similar characteristics. Among the soldiers' wives, mothers and sisters there are those who are cheerful, those who are invariably grumbling, those of active habit, those who are invariably lethargic, those who constantly require encouragement and reassurance, those who are ready to make the best of everything, those few who keep their houses orderly and clean, and the majority who are content to live in disorder, in insanitary conditions, with nothing of beauty or even comfort around them.

"Some of the women do have an artistic sense, however, and power of execution. In one Hindu house the now middle-aged mother still plays her *vina*, and has drawn wonderful pictures in chalk on the mud walls. In a Moslem house a woman was found cutting out in paper the most exquisite designs of scenery, of mosques, and of flowers. Occasionally I have found Hindu and Moslem women who have drawn and painted formal designs of flowers and leaves on their walls. Paper flowers are very popular as a means of house decoration for weddings, and these are made by the women themselves. They very much appreciate, as we all do, praise of their art, whatever it is, whether of drawing, or of needlework, or of dyeing, or of cookery.

"Almost all the women are *purdah*. One family constantly visited consists of a widow and her two daughters, both of the last being delicate anæmic girls, who have had much malaria, with its usual sequel. One son is in an infantry regiment, the other died recently of tuberculosis. After his death his mother complained that she now had nobody to fetch things from the bazaar, and that she wished her army son recalled! It was suggested that she should do what other women of her age and

rank did—namely, wear a *burqua* and do her own shopping. The suggestion was scorned with the comment that no Moslem lady of her breeding had ever done such a thing, nor would she ever do it. A little later when one of the daughters was seriously ill, a short stay in hospital for observation and tests was advised. At once the idea was rejected with the remark that nothing would induce her to wear the hospital clothes which are obligatory in the ordinary wards.

"Quite apart from the question of clothes, it is often very difficult to get people to go to hospital. A small girl of eighteen months contracted a double broncho-pneumonia. Under treatment one lung cleared up, but an empyema developed in the other. This required aspiration and good hospital treatment. The young mother was ready to take the child to hospital, but the grandmother required much persuasion. She did yield, however, and skilful treatment resulted in a rapid amelioration of the most distressing symptoms. The Welfare Officer had to go frequently to hospital to confirm the improvement by reference to the child's chest. It so happened that after four days she had to leave the town for a few days, and before going she strongly advised that the mother and baby remain in hospital till her return. On the very day she left, however, the grandmother insisted that the child be taken home, and a local quack be called. The child did recover, but there is now an active focus of tuberculosis in that lung.

"Another girl of about thirteen, so pretty that it was a pleasure to look at her, had tuberculosis of the spine, necessitating a plaster-of-paris support. Her brother, a soldier, when on leave, left her in the Welfare Officer's care, who took her to hospital, gave her extra nourishment, fruit, etc., taught her crochet and needlework, and did everything possible to make her life easier to bear. At the beginning of the treatment her general health improved, she had no temperature, but the sinus she had showed no improvement. After three months the plaster of paris was removed temporarily. She then begged to be allowed to go home for two days to enjoy the fun of the wedding of a sister. Permission was given for a two days' stay. She had not come back in a week, and was found by the Welfare Officer in a pitiable condition of dirt and neglect. She had to be forcibly taken back to hospital, and at the Welfare Officer's request a most careful examination was again made, not only

of the spine but of the lungs. Alas, the latter had become infected with the tubercle bacillus, and now her days were numbered. She stayed only another week in hospital, when she was again removed by her non-soldier brother. She was visited again by the W.O. but died a fortnight later.

"One day the Welfare Officer entered the house of a jemadar's family to find the eldest daughter of about eleven in a state of complete dehydration from cholera. She sent an immediate S O S to the men's hospital for doctors and intravenous apparatus and fluids, and employed the waiting time in making and giving barley water and glucose by the mouth, and in applying fomentations. Within an hour the doctors arrived. There was an immediate exodus from the room of mother, grandmother and all the other women who had been present; and the apparently dying girl was left entirely in the hands of two men doctors and the W.O. The intravenous injection of saline brought about an immediate improvement in the child's condition and after being repeated two or three times she recovered.

"Although medical work has occupied the greatest part of the W.O.'s time, other matters have clamoured for attention. On one occasion an attempt was made by a relative to obtain a house belonging to a subedar on overseas leave. This was discovered in the ordinary routine visiting and the advice of the Inspector-General of Police taken. Steps were taken to protect this particular property; and later legislation was passed to ensure immunity from seizure of all soldiers' property during their absence.

"When ration cards first came into force it was inevitable that certain individuals would be overlooked. Many families would have fared ill had not the Welfare Officer reported the omission to the authorities concerned. Sometimes the W.O. was deceived. A woman's ration would have been included in the household ration and she would say that she had had none.

"At first the rationing authorities were under the impression that tea drinking was confined to the well-to-do, and no sugar permits were issued to people getting less than a certain amount of salary. They were frankly unbelieving when the W.O. told them that the wives of the shoemakers with the army liked their tea every morning, and with plenty of sugar in it!

"The domestic problems that have arisen have often been of

an unexpected nature. A woman complained that her brother-in-law had beaten her and threatened to cut off her nose. This used to be a favourite punishment for adultery. The Welfare Officer intervened. In one soldier's family a brother of his committed suicide on the night after his marriage, and threw the whole family into great consternation. How much was grief at his loss, and how much regret at the waste of money on wedding festivities and wedding gifts, it is impossible to assess.

"The arrival of an illegitimate baby always brings problems. Sometimes the mother has the courage to keep and care for her infant, and face the music when her husband returns. This has happened in two cases. Sometimes she gives the baby to the hospital authorities in the hope that it will die. One cold November morning a new-born baby was found abandoned on the veranda of the hospital. The mother was found to be a soldier's wife, and the W.O. was able to bring her and her baby together again. There were many difficulties, but eventually husband and wife were reconciled. Fear is often stronger than maternal instinct. Amongst both Moslem and Hindu communities, adultery is a very grave offence on the woman's side, and is universally condemned. It is usual for her to be cast out of the community and it is seldom that her family will take her back. If the husband's financial support is withdrawn it means that she has literally no means of livelihood except with her former lover or some other man.

"It is because of these human factors that the Welfare Officer among soldier families should primarily be a woman of mature years with sympathy and sound judgment and of sufficient standing to be able to enlist the help of military and civil authority."

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Looking after the two million volunteers now serving in the Indian Army is a task of great complexity, owing to the many languages, creeds and local customs throughout the country. The task of District Soldiers' Boards, Civil Liaison Officers and Welfare Officers is to see that village postal services are efficient, that letters from home are correctly addressed to the soldiers for whom they are intended (often the Welfare Officer must also write the letter), that ration cards are correct, that families receive their allotments regularly, and that people do

not plunge into unnecessary litigation, helping at the same time to ensure that justice is done in deserving cases.

In the Rawalpindi district, which has some 100,000 soldiers serving in the Forces out of a population of 800,000, a Military Petitions Officer has been appointed from the Indian Civil Service to deal exclusively with the affairs of Service families. A daily postbag of some fifty letters discloses that the chief causes of trouble are matrimonial disputes and litigation over land.

One soldier, writing from abroad, said that as he was fighting the Italians he hoped Government would deal kindly with his two cousins, who had been arrested for murder. Blood is hot in the Punjab, and some husbands have been away for four years; Welfare Officers are often hard put to it to settle cases of infidelity before murder is done.

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The basic pay of the Indian infantryman is now £1 12s. 6d. a month, which is small by Western standards, but not inconsiderable when his food, clothing and housing are taken into account; certainly the average recruit is better fed and clothed and richer than he ever was in his village.

Within a year of having passed into the ranks he will probably be earning an extra 5s. 2d. a month proficiency pay. He is also credited with deferred pay at the rate of 4s. 6d. a month, which he cannot claim until he leaves the Army, and which provides a nest-egg with which to start in civil life.

A further 3s. 6d. a month is earmarked by the Government for each soldier, for the Rural Reconstruction Fund, which is to be applied to projects such as anti-erosion work, and improvement of roads and canals, to benefit ex-soldiers. This now amounts to over £4,000,000, and is quite apart from the soldier's deferred pay, which is his personal property.

While serving abroad the soldier receives from 10s. 6d. to 18s. a month in extra allowances. Family allotments vary, but the average remittance of the private is amazingly generous, from £1 to £2 a month, and higher ranks send proportionately higher sums. These are distributed through the agency of the District Soldiers' Board, on which many women are employed, often as unpaid volunteers.

When a soldier goes overseas information is sent by his regiment to the District Soldiers' Board, giving his name, his

family's address, and the allotment to be made; the Board then arranges that his family is visited. Rural post offices accustomed to handle, say, £20 a month have now to distribute sometimes ten times this sum, and naturally there are difficulties to be settled. Other Indian problems arise with regard to letters, for only 12 per cent. of the people can read and write.

Much more might be done for the Indian soldier if only there were more educated helpers available, but their lack is not to be remedied in a few months or even a few years.

In London the Indian Comforts Fund, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Amery, is doing good work in looking after the prisoners of war. Last year 647,224 food parcels and 24,764 bundles of clothing were sent to Geneva for distribution.

More than a thousand parcels a day are packed in India House by volunteers, and the remainder at the British Red Cross in St. James's Palace. Food parcels are "caste-proof," and contain fish, sugar, tea, salt, fruit, dried eggs, biscuits, chocolate, margarine, condensed milk, rice, *dhal*, wheat-flour and curry powder. One's heart goes out to these men, so far from home and the life and climate they know. Having been a prisoner of war myself, I know how much parcels mean to captives in a strange land. The letters of thanks received show how greatly the gifts are appreciated, and it is no exaggeration to say that the regular receipt of food parcels has often made the difference between life and death to Indian soldiers languishing in Germany.

## IX

### *Allies*

**I**N June, 1942, a team of American bulldozers began work on the peaceful pastures of a military dairy farm in the United Provinces: they uprooted trees, flattened mounds, ploughed in seven small villages, and filled in a score of ponds, converting the site into an aerodrome.

When I saw the place, eighteen months later, it was an air supply and maintenance centre, employing 5,000 people; a key-point for the vast air traffic between the United States and China.

We are accustomed in Europe to think of the United States as the home of luxury. Let us never forget it is also the home of pioneers. This aerodrome, with its miles of huts, hangars and asphalt runways, was made and is being managed by men whose ancestors opened up a continent.

There is only one air-conditioned room in the whole depot, and it is not for men but machinery—the engine-assembly line. “We weren’t raised to be pets,” the Commanding Officer told me. “We come from Texas, and have the same sort of climate there.” That may be, but I think they have more amenities in Texas than are to be found in this part of India when a dust storm is blowing.

A kind of wistful look came into the eyes of the staff-sergeant at the men’s canteen, when I asked did they serve ice cream? They had had thirty gallons last week, he said, when the “mix” came through from Karachi, and it had lasted just two days. As to coca-cola, they had almost forgotten what it was.

The canteen is called a Post Exchange, the term dating from the days when the Red Indians brought their furs to barter for beads or fire-water. There wasn’t any fire-water in the “P.X.”; in fact, nothing but home-made lemonade, razor blades, Penguin sixpennies, and chewing-gum. But the Enlisted Men’s Club took my breath away. It is equal to any officers’ mess of any British battalion in peace-time, and larger, with its billiard table, ping-pong room, radio room, snack bar, and well-furnished lounges with electric fans. “This is a morale-building



factor," my guide told me. It must be; but what use can there be for a snack bar? Here is the menu in one of the regular squadron messes on the day of my visit:

*Breakfast.*

Fried Eggs, American Bacon, French Toast, Maple Syrup, Oranges, Honey Melon, Hot Coffee, Iced Milk, Iced Water, Bread, Butter, Oatmeal Mush.

*Dinner.*

Cream of Tomato Soup, Hamburger Steak, Smothered Onions, Oven-Baked Potatoes, Brown Gravy, Boiled Spinach, Boiled Brown Beans, Mixed Fruit Cocktail, Bread, Butter, Marmalade, Iced Chocolate, Iced Water, Hot Coffee.

*Supper.*

Cold Sliced Ham, Corned Beef, Sardines, Devilled Eggs, Potato Salad, Pickled Beets, Sliced Cheese, Vanilla Pudding, Bread, Butter, Jam, Iced Tea, Iced Water, Hot Coffee.

That makes our mouths water in war-time Britain, but we should remember that these boys eat a lot of dust as well as honey melons.

Liberators, Lightnings, Mitchells, Warhawks and Dakotas were lined up on the tarmac. "Winsome Winnie," "Burma Roadster" and "Boisterous Bitch" were warming up their engines before taking the air for China. The air traffic control room is an unforgettable place, with its deceptively casual appearance; and the names and times chalked up on the black-board gave me a thrill. So did the pilots, some still in their harness, their eyes weary with long vigil. "And all unseen Romance brings up the nine-fifteen. . . ."

To keep the planes in the air occupies more than a thousand men. Another thousand look after the stores for outward despatch, in secret and well-scattered sheds. You may see also clusters of roofless, three-sided, blast-proof walls, looking like the ruins of one of the ancient Delhis, which were built to shelter Allied planes in the days when the Japanese and the Germans were within bombing range of this part of India.

I walked through miles of hangars and workshops, sat in the cockpits of fighters and bombers, and in the blister of a Fortress, watched engines being assembled and others being "cannibalised," and others again under the scrutiny of instruments that know exactly what is happening in their insides; and finally I

visited the Indian staff, which numbers about 3,000 and ranges all the way from chief accountants and chief storekeepers to mechanics, fitters and servants. Everyone is on "indefinite probation," which means that at the end of the month he is liable to be promoted, or reduced in rank, or dismissed.

No caste prejudices are permitted while at work. A sweeper has been put in charge of a labour gang of 200 men, and has long ago forgotten his lowly estate. The system works well. Wages are good, so long as good value is given. Clerks soon discard their ancient habits of writing long memoranda to each other, for the supervisor of their section judges them by results, and their salaries depend on him. (What would happen, I wonder, if the Government of India ever adopted American business methods?) Moreover, since the depot is isolated, the clerical staff must walk or bicycle to work, which provides for an automatic elimination of the unfit.

Certainly the Americans are doing a grand job here. Every Indian clerk and craftsman who works for them is benefiting, not only in money, but by the example of their infectious energy and enthusiasm.

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My contacts with the Chinese troops were confined to dining with two Chinese colonels in the Air Force, who spoke hardly any English; and to attending a review of Chinese pilots in Lahore. My impression of them is hardly worth writing down, for they seemed quite inscrutable: sphinxes whose eyes looked beyond the present to some Far Eastern dawn.

Their instructors are enthusiastic about their character and ability. They are the pick of Young China, selected by the Generalissimo himself for training in India and the United States.

\* \* \*

The British soldier in India is not an ally, but a comrade, and his friendship with Indian troops has much increased of late. It is a friendship born of mutual respect, and often cemented in blood.

Wherever the British soldier goes he makes friends. The people may be suspicious at first, or shy; many Indians are; his sincerity soon wins their hearts. That is the truth. He

has done more than win battles. He is the Empire's best ambassador.

In times gone by the Indian fighting man was segregated from the British soldier as if he carried some contagion. I can well remember the days when British regiments were not allowed to compete in games with the Indians, presumably lest the Paramount Power should lose prestige by being defeated. Today such nonsense has long been forgotten.

In Italy the adjutant of a famous British regiment said to me (and his words were more convincing than a high-flown tribute, for they were spoken between mortar bursts): "These Indians are aggravating devils at times, *because they don't know English*, but by God they can fight!"

When Gallabat was taken by British and Indian troops in November, 1940, the fort was very heavily bombed by the Italians. It was then evacuated, except for a party of Garhwalis, under a lance-naik, and two British signallers. The lance-naik was much concerned for the safety of the signallers, who were exposing themselves unnecessarily in his opinion. When a bomb crashed through the roof the lance-naik threw himself upon one of them to cover him, and was himself mortally wounded. The signaller survived. Before dying the lance-naik whispered: "*Bahut thik hai!*"—"That's very good!"

## X

### *Industrial India*

THREE-QUARTERS of India's vast population live in the countryside, yet there remain twice as many city dwellers as there are inhabitants in the United Kingdom. Many of these become soldiers, especially in the technical services, and many more millions are employed on the industrial front.

Lord Wavell emphasised this point when I saw him recently. Although India's industrial effort is not of a spectacular kind, she has clothed and tented and shod the greater part of the forces in the Middle East and the armies on the Burma front; valuable as her man-power has been, not the least part of her contribution is her vast output of war supplies. For instance, in 1943 the value of Indian textiles was £74,250,000, and 16,250,000 pairs of boots were made.

At Tatanagar, near Calcutta, the Tata Iron and Steel Company employs 200,000 workpeople in the largest steel-mills in the British Empire,<sup>1</sup> producing annually more than a million tons of steel ingots and 750,000 tons of rolled products, including high-speed steel for machine tools and special armour-piercing and bullet-proof steel alloys. The making of armour-plate and machine tools represents a very great technical advance in Indian heavy industry, and is chiefly due to Tata's research laboratories.

I met the head of the firm, Mr. J. R. D. Tata, in his palatial office in Bombay: a slim, active, brown-eyed Parsi. In addition to his many other interests, he is one of the pioneers of civil aviation, holding the first pilot's certificate issued in British India, and controls the successful Tata Airlines, which carry so much urgent war traffic today.

The standard of literacy in Tatanagar is the highest in

<sup>1</sup> The next largest in India is the Steel Corporation of Bengal, with its allied companies, whose production is one-fourth of Tata's. Mr. G. Tyson's excellent book, *India Arms for Victory*, surveys the whole industrial scene with greater amplitude than is possible here.

India, and every kind of amenity is provided for the workers. The shares of the company, which were worth £2 in 1912, now stand at £130, and reflect the important position that this great firm occupies in Indian industry.

Tata's make much else besides steel, and most of their output goes to munition factories and ordnance depots of the Indian Government. The output of such places is naturally secret, and coefficients of expansion without supporting figures suggest little or nothing to the critical mind. Unfortunately, but reasonably, the totals of ships, guns, shells, cars, and ammunition made in India are not published. I may say, however, that Government munition factories have trained 47,000 new operatives since 1940, and that India makes all the ammunition required for the Burma front (and colossal reserves for future operations). Government orders for jute have amounted to £20,000,000. In two years cottage industries working for the Services have made camouflage nets, blankets, cotton and leather goods to the value of £8,250,000. Hand-loom weavers in the United Provinces alone made 600 miles of army blankets in 1942; and in Cawnpore the Government harness and saddlery factory made military equipment to the value of £15,000,000.

Cawnpore, "the Manchester of the East," has a rapidly expanding population of 600,000. The monthly wage bill of the British India Corporation has doubled itself since the war began, and is now in the region of £47,000. Sales amount to £5,500,000 a year as compared with £2,000,000 in 1939; and practically all this represents orders placed by the Supply Department or the Defence Services. In Messrs. Cooper Allen's tannery, another Cawnpore firm, Mr. Tyson tells us that the 900,000 hides processed in 1941 would cover an area equal to three-quarters of Hyde Park.

All over India I have seen young men at work learning technical trades. Most of them are finding a lifetime vocation, for military needs run parallel with the civil requirements of the future; and to this extent the war has been a godsend to the middle classes, for their sons are now learning practical jobs instead of undergoing the usual sterile academic training to fit them for bureaucratic employment, until lately the lode-star of the intellectuals.

It was stimulating to visit the busy workshops at Ambala and Lahore, where thousands of Indian Air Force boys were being

trained as mechanics, riggers and electricians, and more busy workshops where more thousands of boys were being trained as motor transport drivers and mechanics.

I have seen the same sort of thing in former days in Stuttgart, Stalingrad, Moscow, Gorki, Cowley and Detroit. Without being an expert in any industrial process, I can claim to have visited many factories and watched the youth of many nations making calipers, set-squares and scribing blocks, and it is evident that India is not behindhand in teaching her apprentices.

In the van of such progress I should put the Mechanical Training Establishment of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay, for its course aims to build character as well as to teach craftsmanship. The system is founded on years of experiment in the Royal Navy in making men self-reliant and resourceful as well as *masters of their materials, for breakdowns at sea call for guts and initiative as well as knowledge*. From the very beginning the boys are taught to reason things out for themselves rather than rely on books or even their instructors. Looking to the future, such methods should be valued above rubies.

\* \* \*

Among the elder self-made men of India there is no more striking figure than that of the Parsi multi-millionaire, Sir Homi Mehta, whom I had the good fortune to see in Bombay, though all too briefly.

"I began life in Lancashire," he told me, "earning a pound a week as a mill hand. That's why I've made several fortunes. I know the inside of my businesses." Today he is a director of the Central Reserve Bank of India, Honorary President of the Red Cross in Bombay, and chief proprietor of two great insurance companies, five mills, three sugar factories and a chemical works.

"If I were forty years younger," he said, lighting a very long Virginian cigarette, "I should be leading an industrial revolution. We've had too much politics in this country and not enough commercial enterprise. We must raise the standard of living and the fertility of this ancient soil of ours. It costs a labourer fifteen rupees a month to provide the bare necessities of life for himself, let alone his family. As a matter of fact, you

would find it difficult to keep a dog nowadays on fifteen rupees a month."

I asked Sir Homi Mehta about the "Birla Plan,"<sup>1</sup> and he was just starting to reply when he was interrupted by his secretary, who reminded him that he had an appointment in five minutes.

"With the Red Cross," he explained. "I've already raised one and a half million pounds for it, and now they want another £300,000 to be raised in a week. It's a big sum to get in a week. But we'll do it." He rose briskly and made for the lift with the quick step of a man of forty. No one would imagine he was seventy-three.

In Bombay I met also Sir Frederick Stones, managing director of the famous house of E. D. Sassoon: a forthright, fast-thinking Lancastrian who is an enthusiast for cottage industries and hand-loom weaving, which he considers to be valuable not only for supplementing the meagre amount of cotton cloth available in war-time for civil consumption,<sup>2</sup> but the best way to raise the standard of life and purchasing power of rural India.

I have no doubt that cottage industries will be of increasing importance when the Indian Army resumes its peace-time avocations; the hand-loom, not Mr. Gandhi's spinning-wheel, is destined to play an important part in the reconstruction of the countryside.

When, later, I was in Calcutta I was delighted to receive the following letter dealing with the subject:

<sup>1</sup> *A Plan for the Economic Development of India*, by Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, Messrs. J. R. D. Tata and G. D. Birla, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, Sir Shri Ram, Messrs. Kasturbhai Lalbhai, A. D. Shroff and John Matthai.

This plan proposes that £7,500,000,000 should be spent on development, in the following proportions: Industry 44·8 per cent., housing 22 per cent., agriculture 12·4 per cent., communications 9·4 per cent., education 4·9 per cent., health 4·5 per cent., miscellaneous 2 per cent. It remains to be seen whether such an enormous capital outlay can be financed; but as a result of the war India will have ceased to be a debtor nation, and may well have a credit of £750,000,000 in London—a tenth of the sum required by the "Birla Plan."

<sup>2</sup> Roughly the position is that, whereas the average *per caput* consumption of cotton goods in India is 12 yards per annum, only some 9 yards per annum are now available, owing to Government war requirements. This deficiency is a serious matter, for the Indian peasant has practically no margin of spare clothing.

"At a distance of eight miles from Calcutta, alongside the Barrackpore Trunk Road, we have been producing various types of tents, hats and canopies. Nearly ten thousand workmen, most of them humble villagers, work under spacious thatched sheds from peep of dawn till late at night, to the accompaniment of songs and music broadcast from radio and phonographs, which has been found to have a very healthy effect on their efficiency and general outlook.

"In these establishments stores worth one hundred and thirty thousand rupees are produced every day, and we have been turning out one store tent every thirty minutes, one cotton tent every fifteen minutes, one jute tent every three and a half minutes, and one topee every three seconds. Our organisation is spread all over the country; and the cottage and small industries, with which we are associated, have made a stout response to the call of the war by producing stores worth nearly fifty million rupees during the space of the last thirty-two months.

"You have always moved with your eyes open and have seen much of men and matters. I am most anxious to have an opportunity of showing you the little we have been able to do in our own humble way, and shall be grateful if you are able to spare us a couple of hours."

It was not long before I was on the telephone to Mr. S. C. Mitter, Director of Industries, Bengal.

I drove out to the open-air tent-making sheds, and on the way Mr. Mitter told me that he began operations with an Army order for blankets in April, 1941; since then he has placed £54,000 worth of orders for blankets in the cottages of Bengal. In recent years he has made 4 million sun-helmets, at a cost of 2s. 3d. each, employing 4,000 workers for twenty months, but the demand is not so urgent now, as the bush-hat is better suited to conditions in Burma. Other articles he has made are 5 million cotton vests, at a cost of 10d. each, £150,000 worth of silk for parachutes, £7,500 worth of buttons, £30,000 worth of combs, and various "hard" stores such as nuts, bolts, and electrical equipment, to the value of nearly £400,000. This year he is making £12,500 worth of goods a day for the various Government Departments.



The largest of the tent-making sheds measured 100 by 30 yards. Like all the other sheds, it was well thatched against the sun, and provided with electricity and loud-speakers.

The 180-lb. Indian tent is known wherever the armies of the Empire camp. More than 190,000 of them have been made here, also some enormous store tents, which require fifty men for their handling.

A happy family atmosphere prevailed in this semi-open-air factory, surrounded by mango-trees and palms, where 8,000 men and women workers marked, cut, sewed, measured, stitched, pitched and packed tents to tunes that seemed to be wafted to them on the breeze. Wages averaged 27s. a week. The minimum was £1 a week. There has never been a strike, doubtless owing to the kindly atmosphere, to good canteen arrangements, and to other amenities, such as a hospital and a dairy farm, which provides a half-pint of milk for every worker who cares to buy it at cost price. At any moment—for instance, if an air-raid is expected—Mr. Mitter or his assistants can address the whole factory simultaneously from the microphone in his office; but generally the radio is used for Bengali songs and music, relayed from records selected by a workers' committee.

\* \* \*

In Delhi I had an opportunity to make a brief visit to Sir Shri Ram's huge cloth and wool mills, which employ 12,000 workers on day and night shifts.

The swimming bath, which is enormous (200 yards long by 30 broad) is used by a thousand people a day in summer. There are many recreation grounds, libraries, rest-rooms, first-aid centres, and a big theatre. I was particularly interested in one of the residential blocks, containing accommodation for three hundred families. Rent was 4s. 6d. a month for quarters to accommodate four or five people. (But sometimes, I gathered, as many as eight squeeze in.) There are twenty servants for the block, chiefly sweepers and water-carriers. A club-house for bachelors provides meals for £1 1s. a month.

A notable feature of Sir Shri Ram's organisation is that two workmen sit on the Board of Directors. They are elected by the workers themselves, from amongst their number. One of them is the dye-machine operator, earning normally £3 10s. a month, but his fees as director add £180 a year to his income.

\* \* \*

The teeming Chandni Chowk of Delhi, the Street of Silver, was laid out by the Emperor Shahjehan in the mid-seventeenth century. Today it is richer and busier than it ever was under the magnificent Moghuls: no man knows how much the merchants possess in hidden stores of silks and scents and precious stones.

The scent shops, however, do not seem as good as they were, if my memory serves. Where is the delicious *attar* of roses of thirty-five years ago, and the fascinating freshness of *khas*? a perfume made of reed grass, which conjures up for me a picture of star-lit nights in this very city, and not a stone's throw from here, when pleasure had its will, and I lay enraptured by the rhythms of the dance.

These are the memories of my twenties; and in my fifties I shall not attempt to recall the follies of youth. My blood has cooled, and this is not a book of reminiscences, but the scent reminds me of a quarter of Delhi which I once knew, where the nautch girls live.

Delhi has many professional dancers, not quite accurately called prostitutes. Some time ago a proposal came before the Municipal Committee that they should be removed from this neighbourhood, and the motion was passed with public acclaim; nevertheless, they have established themselves elsewhere, as is only natural. According to official figures there are now only two hundred professional hereditary nautch girls, twenty families of a "criminal" tribe known as *Nats*, some hundred hill-girls, eighty gypsies, a hundred runaways, and an equal number of amateurs, a total of some six hundred; from other sources, however, I learn that the total is nearer four thousand. Even this is not a very large number, when the size of the city is considered. The 1941 census gave the population of Delhi as 550,000, but it is now nearer 1,000,000.

The dancing girls of Delhi—and other cities such as Lucknow, Calcutta and Bombay—are not street-walkers or lights-of-love, who sell their favours to the highest bidder. They are professional entertainers, and many charge high fees—£75 is common—merely for a few hours' song and dance. Others are famous as educators of youth: parents send their boys from long distances to learn from them manners and deportment. Certainly these girls suggest and inspire physical passion—that is their profession—but they do so in subtle and graceful ways.

Anything like "strip-tease" would be utterly alien to them. I am not saying this makes their performance more moral. I dare say the reverse is true. But I do say that the difference between a nautch in Delhi and a cabaret show in London or New York reveals wide gulfs between East and West.

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To return to the Chandni Chowk! Let us walk upstairs to the parlour of a highly respectable bullion broker. There it is that the village parents buy the gold or silver for their daughters' dowries. By pure chance I have come to the office of one of the chief dealers in the city.

Mr. Hukum Chand, the proprietor, comes to greet me: a tall, clear-eyed Jain, with a heavy jaw and fine forehead. I ask whether much gold passes through his hands. "About a lakh a day," he answers—say, £7,500 worth.

Turning to an old deal cupboard, he takes out some pieces of gold. The first, stamped with his name, is about the size of a half-crown, but thicker. "That's worth about two hundred pounds. And here is an ingot, worth about ten times as much."—"Can I buy it?" I ask.—"Certainly. The only restriction is that you are not allowed to export it."

In another corner a clerk squats on a reed mat, with a pair of scales before him. A customer arrives, and produces from the fold of his loincloth seven pieces of silver. He is not selling them, but having them weighed. The clerk puts them on the scales, adjusts the weights, and balances them with a tiny red seed, makes a calculation, and gives the customer a certificate, for which the latter pays a halfpenny. This *chit* will be accepted everywhere as the correct weight of the silver.

\* \* \*

How do the merchants guard their property? When I asked this question of Mr. Hukum Chand he merely replied that he had a night-watchman, and that he trusted the police, but I cannot help thinking that he must make other arrangements also. True, the average citizen is polite, law-abiding and sober. (I never saw a drunken Indian during the six months' travel, and wish I could say the same of my countrymen, and the Americans.) Delhi looks a gay and peaceful city. Sacred cattle roam the streets, eating what they will. Tonga ponies carry carnations behind their ears, and cows' horns are wreathed with

jasmine. Nevertheless, things in India are never quite what they seem. There is a dangerous criminal element here, gangsters as ruthless as any in the world; and I feel sure that the rich merchants have some private organisation against thieves.

Grain merchants' shops are piled high with wheat and barley sacks from the surrounding plains, and lakhs of rupees pass through their tills daily, of which only a small part goes to the banks. What happens to the rest? No one would tell me, but I believe millions are buried under mud floors.

Leaving the matter unsolved, as one so often must in India, let us turn off the Chandni Chowk to see the homes of the people in the narrow, crowded, mediæval byways.

What is it that first strikes a European in an Eastern city? To judge by myself, it is the air of leisurely contentment. In our cities nine out of ten passers-by look hurried, harassed, worried. Not so here. The people seem to be enjoying the congestion of the bazaars and byways. Poverty is not so dreaded, and wealth is not so eagerly sought, as with us; they have other illusions; gods in the Himalayas instead of Mammon in the marketplace. There is a free-and-easy atmosphere.

A washerwoman is folding her clients' laundry in a narrow street, on the stones of the pavement. Why? Nobody knows. She prefers it to her little house opposite, so there she is in the street.

If I stood on my head here nobody would give me more than a passing glance. It is often done. Eventually kind people would give me a little food, and even money. I should pass as a saint, or as a man afflicted by God. Nobody would suggest my moving on.

Here come three *bhairagis*, nude, holy men, carefully whitened with wood ash, with long ropy hair. Police dissuade them from walking about in the European quarter, where they would shock the residents, but here they are at home. At home with the holy bulls, who nibble toffee from the open shop fronts, and interrupt the traffic: holy men and holy bulls; protestants both against the tedious modern urge for speed and uniformity.

And why do the bulls in this country behave in such platonic fashion towards the cows they meet? Here is another of the mysteries of India which must remain unanswered.

There are 50,000 milch cattle in this city, and a far larger

number of goats, all living in the houses of their owners. You may see a cow up there, being milked in a first-floor apartment.

Here is a tobacco shop. The cheapest ordinary cigarettes cost  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. for a packet of twenty; but the proprietor also sells *birris*, cigarettes of coarse Indian tobacco, wrapped up in the leaf of the *dhak* plant, which sell at fifty a penny. Very nasty they are, to my taste; resembling somewhat the cigarettes which some contractor tried to induce the troops in Italy to smoke. (Fortunately he failed.) The tobacconist tells me that he can make a hundred packets of twenty-five in the course of his working day. When these are sold his receipts will be 4s. 6d., leaving a profit of perhaps 1s. or 1s. 6d.

He also sells *pan*, the Indian equivalent of chewing-gum. The confection consists of a betel leaf, over which some slaked lime is placed, with other condiments such as *catechu*, pods of an astringent plant, or cardamoms, or cloves, or *supari*, another pod which supplies a non-soluble chewing base. The lime and the betel form a red mixture when chewed. The price is a halfpenny for two leaves.

An elderly Moslem, with full red beard, henna dyed, passes me, leading a sheep, dyed with yellow spots, by a string round its neck. Behind him is a veiled relative—a wife, sister or child. Mistaking me for someone else, no doubt, he greets me with: "Peace, cherisher of the poor!"

Here comes a camel, plodding along with two sacks of grain across its hump, filling the whole street, and looking cynically into the top windows. The house, I see, is inscribed over the lintel with the name of "Ram Dutt, Pensioner, 1905." Forty years ago it was a mark of honour to be a pensioner of the Indian Government.

Many of the shopkeepers are busy making as well as selling something: cobblers, carpenters, then a hand printing press of extreme antiquity, at which a couple of ten-year-old boys are turning out what they tell me is an edition of a weekly paper. (Shades of the *Spectator*, where I learned my trade!)

Here are some dyers, working in the gutter, with bowls of crimson, green, sapphire-blue and saffron. They dip, rinse, dip, rinse, dip their lengths of cloth in successive bowls of dye, with a swift dexterity which produces a rainbow fabric as if by magic.

Next door is a tinsmith mending pots amidst the embers of

a charcoal fire. With a few sweeps of a scrub, dipped in ashes, he scours a pot, dabs it with melted tin, covers it with glistening metal. Hey presto! The pot shines with a lustre as bright as electro-plate, and much more permanent.

His skill is amazing. Wherever I go in India I am told that only the surface of her industrial possibilities have been scratched. And it is true. Here is what Mr. Tyson tells us of the *mistry*, the hereditary metal-worker of India. "The chief engineer was visiting a workshop one day, in the early stages of production, with the idea of checking over finished base-plates with a micrometer graduated to one ten-thousandth of an inch. The head *mistry* was very interested in the proceedings, but not impressed with the micrometer. A considerable number of base plates were checked over, and all were found to be the same diameter within one-thousandth of an inch.

"On being asked the secret of such accuracy the *mistry* produced from the folds of his clothing his set of 'master' gauges. In appearance they resembled bits of wire and hairpins. With reluctance he allowed them to be tested by micrometer. The degree of accuracy was found to be very fine indeed. How and when they were made was not divulged, but the secret of accurate workmanship lay in the fact that each operative had to submit his gauges to the head *mistry* twice a day for check against the 'master' set."

My own experience confirms this. I knew a *mistry* who could make a padlock or a silver cup or mend a watch. His tools were a file and a cool chisel.

This old courtyard, with its carved entrance, was once part of a Moghul house, with lawn and fountain in the centre. Children swarm everywhere, and women of all ages. The walls bulge, shored up with rotten timber. Windows gape, as glassless as if a flying bomb had fallen. Doves coo in the crumbled eaves, rags hang from decrepit balconies, and there are hens all over the house, and a dozen cows, this time on ground level. The women, seeing me, pull *saris* over their faces, with a flash of silver-braceleted arms. Yes, silver bracelets, though they must be close to the starvation line.

How many people live here? I don't know, and I dare say nobody else does, for they come and go. They squeeze in when the mood takes them, and when the mood takes them they emerge, with their beds, and walk away.

The children squat where they will for calls of nature. For adults there is a single privy behind a broken door, consisting of a single bucket, as far as I can make out, but I do not enquire too closely. At night the city sweepers empty the buckets and remove the contents in a slowly pacing buffalo-cart. There is no drainage system except the gutter in the street.

Let us go—and quickly—to a Municipal Board elementary school, about which I can say some pleasant things. All the children's shoes are neatly ranged outside their rooms. They sit on the floor with slates; boys and girls are mixed, for they are all under nine years of age. They are from a poor quarter, but are clean—at any rate, do not smell of sour sweat, as do the unfortunate poor children of our cities, whose families have so few conveniences for washing clothes and so little sunshine in which to dry them.

One class stands up to sing the school version of the National Anthem—in Urdu, of course—and I ought to have asked for a half-holiday for these small loyal citizens, or at least have bought them some sweetmeats; but I was thinking about their future (which at the moment concerns them not at all) and wondering how many of them would one day be in uniform.

My last stop was at the oldest sweet-shop in the city, dating from the days of Akbar, and wearing the smug, solid, respectable look of all such ancient places from Delhi to Ipswich. Twice it must have been looted, by the Persians under Nadir Shah, and again by the British and Indian soldiers in 1857.

Think of the scenes this little street has witnessed! Think of the generations of children whose mouths have watered at those arabesques of honey and melted butter, made now as in Moghul days! Think of the glittering nobles who rode this way, and the curtained litters that set down the Pearl of the Palace or the Light of the World for her morning's shopping:

Delicious ladies, with long dark hair,  
And soft dark eyes, and brows arched wide,  
In quilted jacket, embroidered sash,  
And tent-like skirts of pleated lawn,  
While their silk-lined jewelled slippers flash  
Round bare feet bedded like pools at dawn!

\* \* \*

Night is falling, but there is no relief from the heat. To sit

down under a fan is a categorical imperative, and where better than in the Novelty Cinema, where my friend Mrs. Himansu Rai is appearing in a film? Devika Rani—Mrs. Rai in private life—is a star of the Indian screen, with her wide brown eyes, her sensitive nostrils, her lovely voice, and those enchanting symbolic lips which say everything about her country which cannot be expressed in words.

The story of *Hamari Baat* ("Our Affair") is a simple one, about an old pandit and his beautiful daughter and her true love, who are separated by various disasters, but come together in the end.

Owing to the huge population of the country and the great dramatic capacity of the people, there is a big future for Indian films. Two hundred are produced every year, full of soul and atmosphere, though technique leaves something to be desired. Every minor character enters into his or her part with zest, and the stars have not been schooled and groomed and publicised until their spontaneity evaporates.

Indians like moral stories inculcating the virtues of family affection. Thus I see *Hamari Baat* described as "a romance as healthy as the sermon of a saint, or the murmuring of a brook on a moonlit night," and another advertisement as "a picture every father should show his son and every mother her daughter, and be proud of it."

The male part of the audience is chiefly in white and the female in the usual brilliant *saris*. Both men and women smoke. They sit silent, attending carefully; a ripple of laughter greets a joke; but there is rarely any applause.

White-uniformed boys sell lemonade and synthetic ice-cream. When the doors are opened some pigeons fly in, remaining to bill and coo on the cornices in the cool twilight, as welcome to them as to us after the glare outside.

And so to bed. It is eleven o'clock, too early to sleep. I lie on under a fan with an irritating squeak, sheetless, sweating, watching two lizards in a patch of moonlight on the wall.

Strong, well-adapted, sinister little midgets they are, with their bright green bodies, big eyes, and firm, adhesive feet. They hunt together, taking turns to kill: perhaps they are a married couple. Their reaction-times are so quick a fighter pilot would envy them.

When I talk to them they listen carefully, but at my slightest



motion they dart towards a crack in the wall. Towards it only, because they wait to see what I will do next. They are full of curiosity; and I have read somewhere that they have an ear for music.

Music comes from far away, the tomtoms of some marriage party. Tonight another soldier will be begotten. Many soldiers. Nobody could sleep in this weather. Or could they?

Mr. Lizard stirs. He has seen the quarry and turns to his partner: "Your moth, I think?" They look like tiny tanks about to go into action.

Lovely in dye and fan  
A-tremble with shimmering grace,  
A moth from her winter swoon  
Uplifts her face.

Mrs. Lizard pounces, and holds the prey for a blissful minute in her jaws before beginning to crunch and swallow.

## XI

### *Burma Front*

AS one flies north-east, over verdant Bengal and smiling Assam, from Calcutta to Imphal, first across miles of swamps and dozens of little rivers flowing north to south to join the Ganges and Brahmaputra, then over thick forests and great mountains, one realises the difficulty of communications in this country.

Imphal, in the State of Manipur, is the centre of the "Burma front," but of course there is no real front, only a succession of strongpoints and rival encirclements stretching from the high Himalayas in the north, where the Americans and Chinese are operating, through the central sector, based on Imphal, and then down to the creeks and estuaries of the coastal region of the Arakan.

Bengal is bigger than Great Britain and contains 60,307,000 inhabitants. It lies across the air routes to Burma, China, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Australia, and New Zealand. Whatever its future political status, its strategic importance to the free world is clear. If the Japanese had once been able to establish themselves in Bengal, they would have built dozens of aerodromes there and dominated a large part of India. Now it is the Allies who have built the aerodromes, and Calcutta, the second largest city in the British Empire, producing £12,500 worth of war material a day, is a vast supply base for the Far East.

With these thoughts in mind I landed at Imphal. While waiting for the luggage to be off-loaded, I saw a closed lorry back up and out of it emerged a hefty Burmese matron with the biceps of a boxer.

"Come on, beautifuls," said an R.A.F. sergeant. Whereupon a dozen girls came out, young, gay, with jasmine twined in their hair. They formed a chain into the body of the Dakota, and began unloading. Swiftly the work went forward. These graceful children, superintended by the matron, swung out ammunition boxes weighing several hundredweight each as if they were playing ring-a-ring-of-roses.

No one thought this odd. Nor is it in Imphal. Presently the lorry was filled almost to the roof-top; yet somehow or other the beauty chorus packed in and vanished in a cloud of dust. I drove to the Press Camp, much impressed. This was a strange war. Its grimness I was to see later.

At another aerodrome in Imphal I visited one of the Indian Air Force Squadrons which I had met at Kohat. It was a tactical reconnaissance unit for Corps Headquarters: three flights of Hurricanes. A hawk-eyed Sikh, Rajendra Singh, was acting squadron leader, his senior officer being in hospital with tonsillitis.

"Tac R." work is difficult and dangerous, although much of it is undramatic, and remains unknown to the troops. There are daily reconnaissances, and sometimes bombing sorties, to be made when the air-interpretation experts decide that fuel dumps or river boats disclose enemy activity. Dangerous electric storms and convectional currents abound, and an engine failure sends the pilot crashing into tangled jungle with only the slenderest hope of survival. Pilots and observers risk death daily as their normal routine, and each man is answerable only to his own conscience for that "little more" which means so much when the fleeting opportunity can be seized. The Army is proud of them. So must the R.A.F. be, who trained the original teams in its fine traditions.

I have already mentioned Mehar Singh, who made a forced landing on the North-West Frontier in 1937. He is a sturdy, heavily bearded giant from Lyallpur in the Punjab, aged twenty-nine, and is now commanding an I.A.F. squadron in Burma.

Mehar Singh recently received the D.S.O. (the first to be awarded to the Indian Air Force) for his fine leadership in the Arakan. Since then he has performed a remarkable feat. One of his pilots made a forced landing in a paddy-field only half a mile from the Japanese lines, the 'plane having been badly shot up and the fuel tank pierced. Mehar Singh loaded up a Tiger Moth (a training machine, slow and unarmed) with petrol and repair tools, and flew it to the wrecked 'plane, accompanied by the remainder of the squadron to guard it from the dangerous Zero fighters. He landed; examined the leaking tank, plugged it, filled up with petrol, sent the pilot back with the squadron escort in the Tiger Moth, and himself

made the flight in the damaged machine. With men such as Mehar Singh as leaders, the I.A.F. is destined for a splendid future.

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During the Battle of Britain there were forty Indian Air Force pilots in the R.A.F. helping to guard English skies. (Strange how few of us know this, either in England or India.) Most of them are now back in India, and many are on active service in Burma. One of them is Flight-Lieutenant S. E. Sukthanker, who holds the coveted Pathfinder Badge as well as the D.F.C. for his leadership of raids over Essen, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Munich, Nuremburg, Bremen, Turin, Genoa and Spezia. Alas! I did not meet this young Mahratta Brahmin, a hero among heroes, for he was on his way out from England when I was on my way home.

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The road to Burma leads south from Imphal and forks at Palel, one road continuing due south over the mountains to Tiddim and the other, also over mountains, turning south-west to Tamu in "Death Valley," and then onwards and upwards across the Indian frontier until it drops down to the Chindwin River near Taungdut. I followed the latter route, for I had been asked to stay with a Gurkha battalion on the heights overlooking the Chindwin.

It was by this route that many of the refugees of 1942 dragged themselves painfully from Burma. Of all the sad roads on earth, none has carried a more pitiful tide of humanity than this cruel path through the jungle. The refugees were sick, starving, surrounded by beasts as well as human enemies, and were often beyond hope of succour. Those who could march marched, leaving the weak to perish. When the Indian Army returned to "Death Valley" in 1943 they found villages of skeletons there, sitting or lying in straw huts that had been burned above their heads when they had perished of plague, or cholera, or typhus, or when nerve and muscle could move their bones no longer. Some had been eaten by pig or porcupine. Several families of clothed yet fleshless skeletons were found in their cars, with luggage packed, and a skeleton driver at the wheel, as they had been sitting when the car ran dry.

The road was a mule track then; now it is a highway. When I was there in March it was in British hands, as it is again today. In spite of the inevitable dust it was an enjoyable journey through forests of bamboo and teak trees, by terraced villages, where wild, half-naked Nagas live. Below us, in the valleys, jungle fires were burning. Rounding some bend in the road, we would come upon a marvellous vista of Himalayan peak after peak, melting into deeper and deeper blues, like panicles of veronica shading from silver-grey to violet. The only untoward incident was when our jeep collided with a 3-ton truck driven by an Indian. Brave men these, but sometimes a shade too valiant when driving round corners. One cannot expect miracles.

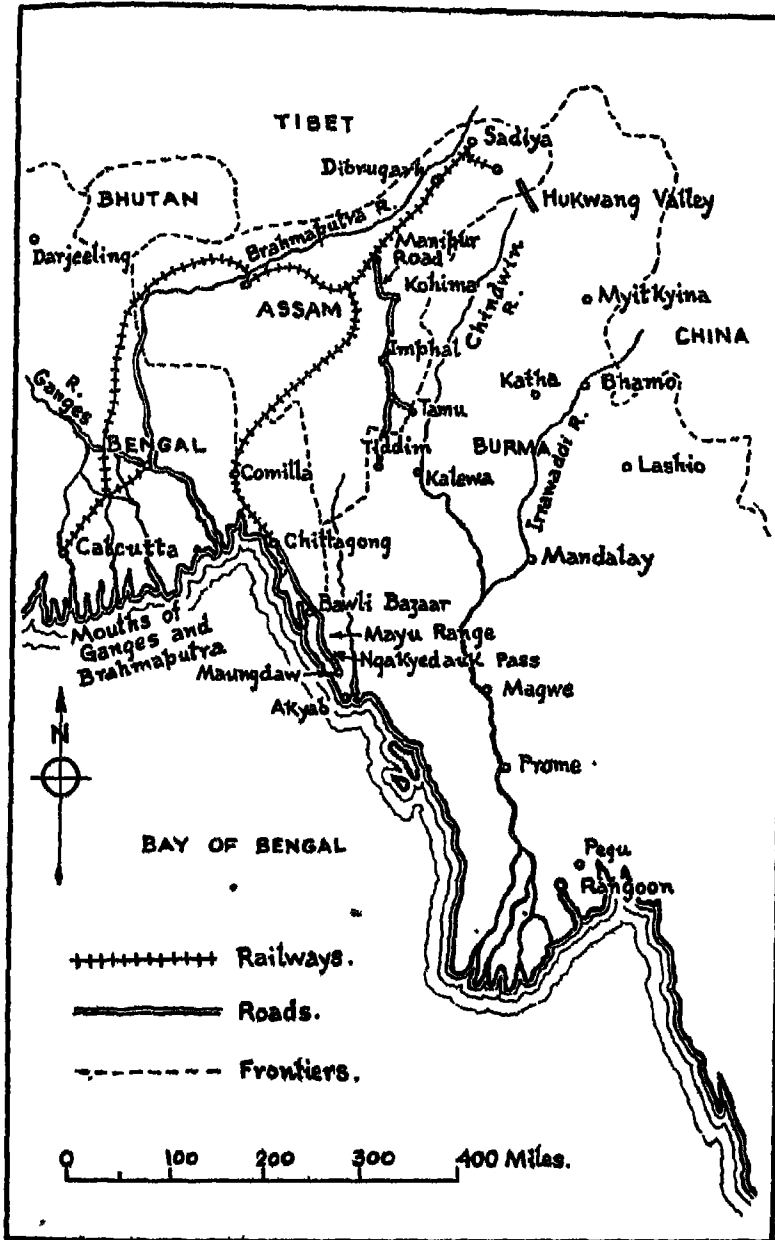
One cannot expect miracles, yet in truth the Indian driver performs them, all things considered. Thousands of these lads were goatherds on the mountains two years ago, or barefoot village boys. Now they are taking supplies to forward troops all the long way from railhead to the front line, driving for ten or twelve hours at a stretch in a soft, white, powdery dust (sometimes a red dust) which permeates the lungs and eyes,<sup>1</sup> negotiating hairpin bends, mending punctures, avoiding rocks and landslips, watching for détours, often at night, often in rain, and sometimes under shellfire or the *whing* of a sniper's bullet. God bless them!

When I reached the Gurkha camp I was strangely tired. Strangely, because I had only been sitting still (or as still as one can sit in a fast jeep), and this was one of the highlights of my Indian journey: the moment when I was at last to see troops in action.

In fact, however, there was little visible. The Chindwin River lay at our feet, three or four miles away, a silver streak in the evening light. Thick jungle surrounded us, of bamboo, with some white-blossomed bohinias and a tangle of thorns, and amongst this undergrowth tall straight *in* and teak trees. Although a battalion of Gurkhas was camped here, for all I could see of it it might have been a platoon.

An orderly took me to a bamboo hut (called a *basha*) furnished with a bamboo bed and a bamboo table, and brought me a half-basin of water. Later I realised what a luxury this

<sup>1</sup> Burma dust is worse than any encountered in the Western Desert. And when the rains come the roads are deep in slippery mud.



was, for water had to be brought on mule-back from two miles away, nearer the enemy. It was dark by the time I had washed off what dust I could, and the orderly returned with a hurricane lamp to lead me to the mess. Alone I could never have found my way along the cunningly devised paths so necessary in camps liable to night attack; a yard to the right or left, and you are enmeshed in thorns and trip-wires, and are lucky if you have not stumbled on a *panji*.<sup>1</sup>

The mess *basha* was built of bamboo. So was the furniture. Within a few hours of arrival at a new camp, riflemen have cut down the necessary number of bamboos and sliced them into convenient slats, with which they make everything required. All ranks sleep on bamboo beds (except on outpost duty) owing to the voracious ticks and leeches. Once the camp is made, everything is hidden—men, ammunition, food; unless you know your way about, you would imagine you were in virgin jungle.

Throughout dinner the Adjutant was kept busy on the telephone, receiving reports from the outpost company, which had observed troop movements on the Chindwin. I remembered this when I read of the attack which developed against Imphal. Certainly it was no surprise.

A bottle of mepacrine tablets was passed round with the tea, which had perforce to take the place of port, and everyone—it is an Army Order—took two of these yellow life-preservers. They contain a dyestuff, which sometimes makes their faithful users look as if they had jaundice, however immune they may become to malaria. I took my medicine with the others, and it made me restless all right.

Unpleasant as life can be on the Burma front, the troops are not always hunting the Japanese: they sometimes have a shot at other game, or spend a few hours fishing for salmon trout by methods not contemplated in Army Regulations. The other day two riflemen stalked a tigress. One of them wounded her at seventy yards, the other went forward cautiously and finished her off at twenty yards. After waiting some time they advanced and trod on her tail. She did not stir!—What if she had? I asked.—Well, I was told, they had their *kukris*!

Another patrol encountered a wild elephant. They fired at

<sup>1</sup> A thin bamboo stake sharpened to a needle-point.

it with a Bren gun, but it merely shook its head and walked away.

Talk turned to Jemadar Gaje Ghale, who had just been decorated with the V.C. by the Viceroy, for his exploit last year, when he was a havildar, and led his platoon against a dozen enemy machine guns. All his men were young and untried. All the platoon officers were killed or wounded during the advance. Gaje Ghale was himself seriously wounded in the arm, chest and leg by an enemy grenade, but went straight on, streaming with blood, towards the razor-backed ridge which was the vital point. All the Japanese were killed in hand-to-hand fighting. Only after the position was consolidated and securely held would he consent to go to hospital, and even then he insisted on walking there, to save the stretcher-bearers.

\* \* \*

I lay that night on my bamboo bed, listening to a sound like rain, and the distant barking of deer. *Was* it deer? Or Gurkhas calling? Or the enemy? The jungle never sleeps; something is always moving: elephant, or tiger, or leopard, or deer, or monkey, or bear, or boar, or porcupine, or the wild ancestor of the European hen; also all sorts of creeping things, including Japs.

Presently I went out to discover whether it was really raining. It wasn't, but the dew was so heavy that drops of water hung on every leaf and shrub. The noise I heard was the rustling of the leaves of the teak trees, which sounds exactly like a heavy shower. I lay back, dozing, then woke with a start.

All round me was quick, stealthy movement. An attack? No, the stand-to. Riflemen were manning the slit trenches an hour before dawn. Officers carried rifles or automatics, to be indistinguishable from their men.

I shaved by the light of a full moon. The river was invisible, hidden by a streak of flocked white cloud. At breakfast the Colonel told me that patrols from both sides of the river—east and west—were always able to return unseen after their night's work, for the waters of the Chindwin are warmer than the night air, and raise a curtain of mist above their flow.

After breakfast I was taken round the defences, a series of strong-points and sentry-boxes, cunningly designed to support each other, and guarded by wicked-looking rows of *panjis*.



After having studied the battalion perimeter, and seen its defenders, I understand why this battalion was reported in the newspapers as having killed an exceptionally large number of Japanese during its fighting retreat to Imphal.

When I left, the men were lunching on curry and rice, tea, biscuits, dried fruit, and dehydrated potatoes. All their rations were Indian-made: the fruit came from the North-West Frontier (where a large preserving industry now flourishes) and the potatoes from firms in Calcutta and Cawnpore. When the stores of these potatoes were captured in Libya two years ago Berlin radio announced that the Germans thought them delicious.

On my way back to Tamu I stopped to see some British soldiers whom I must describe as "a West Country battalion." They were settling in; wiring, digging, and arranging for their water supply, which had to be brought from a long distance, like the Gurkhas'. In spite of hardships, the inevitable isolation, and the constant state of "standing to," they were in high spirits at the thought of meeting the enemy soon. And they met him soon, winning great renown in a retreat that has now been turned to victory.

\* \* \*

In Tamu I had the good fortune to meet Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Williams, D.S.O., who has spent most of his life with elephants in the teak forests of Burma, and who was then engaged on road-building operations in the rear of the Army.

I write "then" because I am not sure at the time of writing where his charges may be. They were certainly overrun by the Japanese earlier in the year, but I do not think they were captured. Williams, I know, escaped.

During the 1942 retreat the elephants had to be left behind, since they are timid creatures, not given to seeking the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth. They were turned loose, and wandered off in groups of eight or ten—as they always do when feeding—and refused to be caught by the Japanese. But when their own *oozis* (keepers) returned the following year, and tracked them down to their grazing grounds, they submitted to captivity contentedly enough. Not immediately, it is true. The *oozis* had to sit near them for six hours, calling "Yu, yu, yu," which means "come" in elephant language. They thought it over, and came. A trained elephant will always obey

his master's voice in the end, but he dislikes being hustled, and any premature attempt to catch them would have sent them crashing away into the forest.

Colonel "Bill" Williams is a big, green-eyed Cornishman and the world's leading expert on working elephants. He tells me that they are the kindest, most dignified, and most helpful creatures on earth; and that they are genuinely interested in their work. Recently he had been watching a she elephant building a bridge; she took pride in getting the planks straight, and when she laid one to her liking she would turn to her *oozi* as if to say, "What do you think of that?" When the roadway was completed Colonel Williams decided that the sides should be heightened by a couple of beams. But the elephant objected. She had taken the trouble to get the roadway flat; what was the sense of spoiling it? Nothing would induce her to move another timber.

All elephants have a nice sense of symmetry and proportion. When the males have their tusks sawn (six inches of ivory are removed yearly) they protest at the process when the first tusk is shortened, but once this has been done they submit gladly to the sawing of the second, for they feel awkward with uneven tusks.

Sick elephants are good patients, and seem to understand that they must take medicine, even if nasty. Williams has seen elephants allow their *oozi* to lance a tumour without wincing, although a Burmese sword must be driven into it with a blow from a mallet. Their trunks are their tender spot, for if they are punctured they can no longer drink; fighting elephants always raise them out of harm's way.

Although elephants are hard workers they will never allow themselves to be overdriven. They like to start the day at 7 o'clock and break off punctually at 11 to bathe, breakfast, and sleep. At 4 o'clock they are ready to begin again.

On this front they are invaluable for bridge-building, and accomplish tasks which labourers and even machines could not perform. Logging is a specialised process in Burma, for in an acre of forest there may be only one tree suitable for felling; the elephant must find it and drag it out—perhaps half a mile—to the logging road.

Elephant couples are faithful to each other for life, and Colonel Williams is one of the few people who have seen their

marriage. A cow's pregnancy lasts twenty-two months. When she feels the stirring of the new life she does something no other animal has ever thought of: she chooses a female to be an auxiliary mother. For months before the birth these two remain close friends. When the child is born the two stand head to tail, and they always feed in this position, with the baby between them, to guard it from tigers. Even with this precaution, however, a quarter of the elephant calves born in the jungle fall a prey to them.

During the first four or five years of a timber elephant's life it is allowed to run free, and it is generally spoilt by its three parents, with the result that the calves become conceited, and sometimes attack the *oozis* and other men in the timber yards. Thinking to teach a lesson to one of these children with a superiority complex, Williams filled his shot-gun with rice, and when she charged him he fired at her toes. She didn't swerve, and Williams had to dodge behind a wood-pile.

Education begins at the age of five, or a little earlier. The child is tied to a teacher-elephant, called a *koonki*, who is a tough old bachelor, or a crusty spinster; and it is compelled to follow the *koonki* about, all through the working day. Unlike the doting parents, the *koonkis* are stern, and at the slightest sign of misbehaviour they slap their charges with their trunks until they squeal.

The schooling process takes some years, and includes various rather complicated operations, such as teaching the pupil to sit down; but Colonel Williams insists that there shall be no cruelty. He considers the spike used by Indian *mahouts* to be useless for timber elephants, rendering them insensitive and sullen. Good *oozis* are extremely patient. Many of them are drug addicts.

It was a wrench to leave "Elephant Bill" and his charges. Today I hope they are swimming the Chindwin River again, back to their own forests, on the heels of the routed Japanese.

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Whatever I missed on the Imphal front, I am glad that I found the 1st Pariala Regiment, and partook of their pleasant hospitality.

Every man in this magnificent battalion of the Indian State Forces stands 5 foot 11 inches, or over: they are the finest lot

of Sikhs I have ever seen, and that is saying much. At the last All-Indian Olympic Meeting they won nine athletic contests out of twelve. Their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Balwant Singh, is a veteran who has won a great reputation in this campaign; and although he is nearer sixty than fifty he can still march forty miles in twenty-four hours with his men, and enjoy it. Every officer in his battalion is a Sikh. In discipline, turn-out, and fighting efficiency the 1st Patialas have earned the unstinted admiration of all their comrades in the division.

Lunch consisted of one of the best curries I have ever tasted; and, by the way, I have always noticed that good regiments feed well, and that officers who cannot look after their own comfort cannot look after that of their men.

Another battalion which is smart by any standard (and the standard in Burma is high) is a Madras unit, whose number I may not give. I don't want to use too many superlatives, or to repeat what their enthusiastic Colonel told me, but these men had already seen stiff fighting in Tiddim, and had their tails well up. Since then they have again been heavily engaged, and have fought magnificently.

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After returning to Imphal I flew back to Army Headquarters, and there, while waiting to go south, I attended the Great Victory Fun Fair and Circus.

This resoundingly-titled entertainment was given in a large, bare *basha*, packed to the door with officers and men on leave, and members of the administrative staffs of the United Nations: red-tabbed colonels and gum-chewing "G.I.s," subalterns and bearded subedars, pilots with "short-snorters" in their wallets, small spectacled clerks in their shirt sleeves, boys in bottle-green battle-dress, convalescents in blue, sailors in white, craftsmen, engineers, marines, all forgetting the war for a few hours and getting back to nursery days.

A row of Burmese girls in sailor clothes was dancing a hornpipe when I arrived. Then a trick cyclist did tricks a child could perform with a little practice, and was cheered to the echo. A pretty half-caste girl danced the hula-hula so badly that she may have been trying to be funny: she got a good hand too. The audience made the circus. It was a happy evening. There was a mysterious Chinese juggler in yellow silk, who tossed a

thing like a shuttlecock in the air and caught it on his toe or the back of his neck. One had no way of telling whether the feat was difficult; he went on and on, for an hour it seemed. He also was applauded, though the spectators began to be talkative.

There was one strange act, also Chinese. Four gymnasts, with lordly mien and gorgeous robes of crimson and gold brocade, compelled our respect and astonishment. Two were oldish men of great strength: the two boys seemed made of indiarubber. They danced to a strange piping; then, stripping off their resplendent apparel, they appeared in black trousers and white slippers, their ivory torsos bare, and vaulted, somersaulted, held long arm balances. It was not what they did, but their manner which produced a strange effect: they changed the whole atmosphere, and might have come out of another world—the Forbidden Palace, for instance. It was a relief, at least to me, when a contortionist appeared in very loose tights, and I could laugh again at ease.

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Next day I flew south, to Chittagong, with the daily issue of *SEAC*, that excellent newspaper for the troops, which does so much to make the British soldier feel he is not forgotten by those at home.

Chittagong is the base for naval operations in this part of the world, and there is no creek or inlet along the coast, from the Tek Naaf estuary to the Irrawaddi Delta, that has not been entered and shelled by the motor launches and assault craft of the Royal Indian Navy. Before these lines are published they will certainly be engaged in still heavier fighting, and operations on a wider scale.

My destination was Bawli Bazaar, five hours' drive to the south, along a road which is the despair of engineers, for there is no rock in the Arakan with which to metal it. All the way to Bawli I saw countless coolies—20,000 of them, I believe—keeping down the dust as best they could. It was a fantastic spectacle, for none of them had such a thing as a bucket. They scooped up the contents of roadside pools with jam tins and cigarette tins, carrying a trickle a minute over inch-deep dust. Every little helps, and these tiny, unceasing ministrations from dotards past active work, pregnant women, cronies with a cigar between toothless gums, and babies hardly weaned, drop by drop, day in and day out, bind the road better than heavy rain.

So I was told. The expense is £500 a day, and puts money in the pockets of the poor.

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I slept in the rest camp at Bawli, and was awakened in the night by rifle shots. My companion in the *basha* gave me a few grenades, and out we went into the starless night. It was a false alarm, as a matter of fact, but one never knows what may happen in these parts.

I was off early next day towards the famous Ngakyedauk Pass, where an important battle had been fought a fortnight previously. The way to it lies along the west side of the Mayu Range, an outlying spur of the Himalayas which can only be crossed in three places, two of them mule tracks and the third the Ngakyedauk Pass.

Late in January, 1944, and in the early days of February intelligence reports showed that the Japanese were planning an attack against the two Indian divisions in the Arakan. The 7th (Indian) Division was on the east side of the Mayu Range, and the 5th (Indian) Division on the west side; the weakness of the position was that the only motorable link was the Ngakyedauk Pass road.

On the afternoon of February 3rd British tanks operating near Maungdaw were withdrawn to the "Administration Box" of the 7th Division at the eastern end of the pass. The following day most of them were sent across to join the 5th Division on the west side. The enemy plan of campaign had been found on a dead Japanese sergeant. Six battalions were moving north along the eastern side of the Mayu Range. They were to mop up the 7th Division and cross the hills by the mule tracks, thus getting in rear of the 5th Division. Thereupon the British would hastily withdraw, and Subhas Bose, self-styled commander of the Indian Army of Liberation, would lead a march on Calcutta, then Delhi.

On the night of February 5th the 7th Division headquarters was duly attacked in great strength. Listeners on the radio-phone at the eastern end of the pass heard a signaller say, "Put a pick through the set!" and knew then that the divisional commander's camp had been overrun. Stout-hearted Major-General Messervy escaped, however, and did not take off his boots for the next critical fortnight.

The "Admin. Box," as it was commonly called, was an open area of paddy-fields, close to where the Ngakyedauk Pass debouches on to the plain leading to Maungdaw. It contained all the supply and maintenance units of the division: a hospital, a transport section, mule companies, sappers, ordnance stores, and an anti-aircraft unit. In all there were about 2,000 men in the box, including a battery of medium artillery and a squadron of medium tanks, who formed the outer ring of the defence. The forward brigades of the 7th Division, which were entrenched in the direction of Buthidaung, did not retire into the box, but remained in position throughout the siege.

Although the troops in the box were in good heart, the danger and difficulty of their position cannot be exaggerated. The Japanese were swarming round them in greatly superior numbers, and held two hills overlooking the pass. They attacked every night and took a daily toll of the garrison with snipers.

Before continuing the story let me interpose the experiences of a Sikh mountain gunner, Havildar Harnam Singh, as he related them to me in hospital. He is an elderly man who served in the last war, grizzled, tough, slow of speech.

"We got into the box on February 6th," he said. "The enemy was howling all round us. We killed a monkey by mistake for a Japanese sniper. Then they attacked. We shot them down in waves. I killed six and wounded one. My officer said we wanted a prisoner, so he and I went out to bring in the wounded man. The Sahib was killed by a shot through the head, and I was wounded in the hip. I managed to crawl back to the box. Then I went out again to bring in the body of the Sahib. By this time the wounded Jap was dead, so I left him."

What happened later I learned in the hospital. Harnam Singh refused to report sick, though his wound was a serious one, and he carried on, doing full duty, until his post was relieved on February 24th. Even then his battery commander had to put him forcibly into an ambulance. "Now I want to get back, Sahib," he said. "I want to kill some more Japanese and see them shovelled into the ground in heaps by a bulldozer, mixed up with dead mules, as we did after we drove them from the Admin. Box."

Harnam Singh was not a bloodthirsty man, but he remembered the night of February 7th, when the main hospital

dressing station in the box was overrun. The Japanese drank up all the rum they could find, then murdered the six doctors there, and all the patients, building their bodies into a parapet.

In the same hospital as Harnam Singh was Sowar Guman Singh, of the Gwalior State Lancers, a Jat yeoman who was taken prisoner with three of his comrades on the Mayu Range in the early days of February.

The Japanese stripped their four prisoners naked, tied them up round a tree, fixed bayonets, and used them as dummies for bayonet exercise. How Guman Singh survived I don't know. He must be a man of great vitality. His three comrades died, and he shammed dead. It wasn't difficult to do, for the Japanese had put their bayonets through him a dozen times. When they left he bit through the rope which held him to the tree and crawled slowly to a nearby pond. After a drink and a rest he made his way to a Burmese hut, where he found some old clothes. He went out disguised as a peasant.

After three weeks' wandering he managed to get back to the British lines. I would hardly have believed the story if I had not seen his wounds myself. He stripped and showed me twenty wide, livid scars in his stomach and buttocks and thighs. Guman Singh also wants to go back to settle his account.

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To return to the Admin. Box. The day after the hospital was overrun the enemy was driven out by a British company, but the situation was still perilous. Although the enemy never took any of the positions round the box, except the hospital, for several days the enemy was only 200 yards away.

Drinking water was obtainable only from a stream under constant enemy fire, and there was none for washing. A message was sent to Army Headquarters asking for food and ammunition to be dropped by air. The response was magnificent.

Great credit is due to Brigadier W. M. Olds, of the United States Army Air Force, who led a pathfinding formation of supply planes over the Admin. Box, when the first flight sent out had failed to locate its position. It was the skill and courage of this tall Texan (incidentally, he was the first man to fly over the Hump with supplies for China) that made the operation the outstanding success it was. During the eighteen days of the



siege proper (February 6th-24th) 1,500 tons of food and ammunition were dropped for the loss of only one supply plane; and the troops declared that they had rarely been so well fed during all their time in Burma.

The Japanese had planned to sweep forward to the Indian frontier in eight days, and expected to supplement their supplies by loot, as they had done in Malaya. (They had an engineering section ready to recondition captured jeeps.) However, instead of hustling the Imperial troops back, they were themselves hustled, exhausted, and left hungry, until the day came when they knew that unless they could capture the Admin. Box they would have to retreat or starve.

The Admin. Box held, and the 5th Division, assisted by heavy artillery barrages and boldly commanded tanks, slowly but surely drove the enemy out of the hills and ravines of the Mayu Range. At noon on February 24th the pass was reopened. It was a notable victory because it was the first time Indian and British troops had decisively defeated the Japanese. The enemy suffered 4,500 casualties, against a quarter of that number on the Indo-British side, many of them lightly wounded.

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Here in the Arakan barges and hospital steamers are used to move wounded men whenever possible, also every type of aeroplane, from the light, specially rigged two-seater to the hospital Dakota. On one of my trips I travelled by air with a dozen West Africans, six Mahrattas, several Punjabis, and two English signallers, stretcher cases who had been wounded only a few hours earlier a hundred miles away.

Throughout Burma—and, indeed, also in Italy—I was impressed by the excellent medical arrangements of the Indian Army. The chain of regimental aid posts, dressing stations, and casualty clearing stations are provided with everything the most modern army possesses in Europe: blood-transfusion sets, plasma, occlusive dressings and so on. In rear areas, however, general hospitals for Indian troops should have more provision made to look after the patients' minds as well as bodies: materials for occupational therapy and women to teach simple handicrafts are badly needed. But where are the women to be found?

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At a casualty clearing station near Bawli Bazaar I visited twenty sick or wounded Japanese prisoners of war. It was the time of the Hindu spring festival of Holi, a sort of carnival when the celebrants throw white and red powder over each other, and some of the Japanese appeared to be sharing in this amusement, for the sitting-up patients were powdered and rouged like geisha girls.

I asked whether any of them knew English. One officer knew a few words; when I asked him how he was getting on, he bowed over his plate of soup and said: "Thank you very much."

I saw a wizened little man, like some figure on a Japanese screen; and another who was plump and round-faced, like a statue of Buddha Satisfied; but none of them seemed quite human to me, for I am very ignorant about the Japanese.

The ward orderly told me that they were all anxious to live; there was no nonsense about suicide or refusing blood transfusions. As I was leaving I noticed that the officer who knew a little English was again bowing over his soup. . . . I wonder whether any of these little men were among those who killed the patients in the Admin. Box hospital?

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The Burma front remains a vital part of the grand strategy of the Allies, because a success here would again establish land communications with China; indeed, the reopening of the Burma Road is now in sight.

At Imphal, until recently cut off from its supply route, the whole of the Manipur plateau has been cleared of the enemy, and Imperial troops are again advancing. In the Arakan there can be little doubt that if Akyab is considered worth taking it could be taken. But when Germany is defeated and more shipping and air-power become available we shall see operations on a scale that may leave Imphal and Akyab as distant villages on the map of the Far East.

Nevertheless, Imperial troops in Burma and Bengal are fulfilling an all-important task in establishing a secure base for such far-reaching operations. In the past they have sometimes felt that they were "forgotten men," enduring dangers and hardships with no visible aim; but such views underwent a change with the establishment of South-East Asia Command.

Wherever Lord Louis Mountbatten goes he inspires all ranks by his friendly manner and magnetic energy. "I've never heard anyone who can speak to the troops as he can," an experienced colonel told me. "He's a regular guy," a corporal said. "He gave me a lift on the Imphal road: driving his own jeep he was." His industry and patient attention to detail are not so well known, but their results will soon be seen.

No one who has not lived amongst the troops in Burma, no matter what his previous military experience may have been, can have any conception of the unremitting strain to which the men are subjected in these devil-haunted mountains and dense jungles. Fighting their way through the monsoon, wet to the skin for three months on end, and with all the dangers but none of the distractions of the Western front, the men of the Fourteenth Army—more than half of whom are Indians—have achieved miracles. It is a tough war, and "there ain't no buses running from the Bank to Mandalay."

## XII

### *Italian Front*

FROM the furnace heat of Delhi, the vapour-bath of Karachi, the dust storms of Basra, and the noise of Cairo I passed quickly to the cool, keen glitter of May-time on the Adriatic coast of Italy.

Troops in Italy still wore serge battledress, and the Punjabi driver who met me at the airport looked smart in his khaki beret, which all Indian soldiers now wear, except the Sikhs, who keep to the turban for religious reasons.

My small and almost bursting suitcase was soon transferred to the staff car, and I was driving through a smiling land of orange-blossoms, vines, wayside Madonnas, and young corn. "These farmers look after their land well," the driver said. "They work almost as hard as we do in our country. At first I thought they worshipped idols, but I was mistaken. They are people of the Book."

I asked him, Was he happy? He replied that he had been four years away from home, but that next to the Punjab this was the best land he had ever seen or hoped to see. He liked the climate, and the fruit, and the plough oxen; the inhabitants were kind; the rations were good; letters from India reached here in ten days or a fortnight.

Indian soldiers are certainly well looked after. Special broadcasts have been arranged for them in eight languages<sup>1</sup> from Cairo, Baghdad, Teheran, and Beirut; and now, no doubt, Rome will be transmitting also. Their weekly paper, the *Fauj-i-Akhbar* (*Army Newspaper*) is published in five languages and has a circulation of 30,000 copies. The bi-weekly *Jang-i-Khabren* (*War News*) is published in eight languages, and prints more than 120,000 copies. There are six other publications for Indian troops.

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<sup>1</sup> Urdu, Hindi, Gurmukhi, Mahratti, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali. Seven varieties of music are broadcast, to appeal to the taste of the various races.

At an Adriatic port I visited a flotilla of special barges (a clumsy description, but their right name has not been released) which fought in Tobruk, Benghazi, Sfax, the Sicily landings and Naples. They are commanded by Captain C. J. Israel, who was a Customs officer in Bombay three years ago.

One of his havildars, a square-jawed, tough young Moslem from Bengal with an infectiously gay laugh, had received the I.D.S.M. for gallantry near Tobruk. After his ship had received a direct hit by a bomb he took command, beached her before she sank, and saved most of the personnel by his leadership and courage. If there are to be any combined operations in this part of the world I have no doubt that Mahomed Ismail will distinguish himself again.

\* \* \*

Like a gold thread through the history of the Indian Army runs the story of the Sappers and Miners of the three Presidency Armies, who have won honour in so many hard battles and have paved so many roads to victory. One of my first visits in Italy was to a company of the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners which had fought at Sidi Barrani, Gallabat, Keren (where it cleared the final road-block), Amba Alagi, Tunis, and then on the Cassino front this year.

At Wadi Zig Zaou last year Jemadar Loganathan of this company reconnoitred a position for a bridge under constant enemy attack, and then completed the work in spite of heavy machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire. "Completed the work" is a very bald description of how he fitted together the component parts of a Bailey bridge while bullets sang and mortar bursts blackened the sky; the work of the Sappers cannot be theatrical; it would lose all its value if it was; their tasks require the coolest kind of courage, the most dogged endurance, and the most self-sacrificing perseverance. . . . Loganathan received the Indian Order of Merit. He is a Mahratta.

In a sister corps, Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners, I met Sapper Kandasami, who received the I.D.S.M. at Cassino in February of this year, when the Imperial troops tried to take the Monastery and failed. It was vitally important to bring ammunition from Monte Cairo to the forward troops near Cassino, but the shelling was so heavy that Kandasami's party, charged with this task, was ordered by the company

commander to break off and take cover. As soon as the latter's back was turned, however, Kandasami went across the bullet- and shell-swept slope. He made twelve trips that day, this quiet, small Madrassi who looks as if he wouldn't hurt a mouse.

\* \* \*

On the Adriatic front I was fortunate in finding a famous Gurkha battalion which had held Hangman's Hill at Cassino, within a stone's throw of the best German infantry, for forty-six days at the beginning of this year, without relief. Only eighteen men went sick.

In another Gurkha battalion, which I met on the western side of Italy on May 13th, just after the crossing of the Gari River, I asked the colonel whether he had recommended any of his men for immediate awards. The colonel pointed to an adjacent slit trench. "I'm thinking of recommending that little chap for an I.D.S.M.," he said, "but the worst of it is he did almost the same thing on the Sangro River. He burst in the door of a house where the Jerries were, chucked a grenade, and killed two or three of them. In fact, he took the house by himself, and got an I.D.S.M. for it. Yesterday he took a trench by himself. His company had lost fifty-six men during the night attack on the knoll near Sant'Angelo. It was a tough spot. We couldn't get the Jerries out. Buddhi Bahadur saw the flash of a rifle two yards away; he made a jump at it and found himself in a trench with six of the enemy. He slashed off the man's head who had fired, then another man's head, and bayoneted a third. The others surrendered."

"Do you think he would show me how he did it?" I asked, looking with amazement and respect at a very small rifleman with a very grimy face.

"We'll ask him, but he's shy," said the colonel.

Lance-Naik Buddhi grinned when asked about his exploit, and his almond eyes became black slits. There was a stubborn look on his face. Gurkhas don't talk about their battles, not to strangers, anyway. Without a word he produced his *kukri* and let me feel its razor edge, which was apparently undented by the cervical vertebræ of the Boches. "He's sharpened it again this morning," the colonel said. "He says he uses a backhand or a forehand stroke equally well. No, they never stab with it.

He hasn't been promoted because he hasn't passed his examinations."

\* \* \*

I sat in the officers' mess at Poggiafiorito and interviewed an Indian officer and an N.C.O. of a Punjab battalion then in action. Subedar Sher Mahomed was a tall, stout Punjabi Moslem from Jhelum with twenty years' service. Recently he had been on outpost duty with a platoon in a cottage in the front line, a key point of the brigade sector. One night it was hit by a bomb and almost completely destroyed. Three men were killed, and all except three were wounded. Sher Mahomed was pinned under a beam and wounded in the head and leg. As soon as he had extricated himself he reorganised the defence of the ruins with the three uninjured men. Only one tommy-gun was available; the remainder of the weapons were buried or broken. Although they were surrounded by the enemy and constantly attacked throughout the night, they held on till dawn, when reinforcements arrived. Sher Mahomed received an immediate award of the Military Cross.

While we talked a certain liveliness developed overhead, and presently an orderly arrived to say that three men had been wounded. An observer in the war zone, free to come and go as he pleases, burdened by no routine or responsibility, suffers from a sense of guilt that he should be enjoying himself while others bear a heavy cross. Yet the average soldier—at least, the average Indian soldier—enjoys meeting visitors and talking about his experiences.

\* \* \*

Next morning I left the Adriatic front, for much was happening on the west. *Stars and Stripes* (the American Army newspaper) displayed a stimulating headline—"Eighth Socks Gustav"—and amongst minor events was an item from Jerusalem that a certain Rudolf Messerschmidt had changed his name to Robert Spitfire. Under the caption "Stray Kids Wanted" I learned that Guido Cornetone, aged sixteen years, was lost. "*His pop would like him back if he isn't too vital a cog in the American war machine.*"

On my way west I stopped at the Jodhpur Sardar Infantry, a unit of the Indian State Forces which had taken part in the

Salerno landing and had worked on the beach for sixteen days under constant bombardment. "Your men have been simply magnificent" was the signal sent to their commander when the task was accomplished.

\* \* \*

All the way across the Apennines and down the rich valleys of the Naples country I saw Indian troops in billets or on line-of-communication duties: signallers, engineers, and military police. Sometimes a pioneer gang would consist of Italian labourers under the command of a jemadar or havildar, many of whom have learned a little Italian.

It was Sunday, and in the remoter villages of the Apennines peasant women were still wearing their traditional flowered skirt and the black veil that becomes them so well. Every Fascist sign had been obliterated, and most of the inhabitants were extremely friendly; however, one haughty black-veiled peasant girl spat at my car as it passed.

\* \* \*

With mounting excitement I drove down the magnificent avenue of eucalyptus trees which leads to the great Bourbon palace at Caserta (then Allied Headquarters) with its proud but unprophectic motto: "As long as these stones stand the dynasty of the Bourbons shall endure!" It was the morning of May 13th, and the battle of the Gari Crossing had been won the previous day.

The road to the front from Caserta to Cassino was electric with excitement, like some fantastic Derby Day of half Europe. By the roadside stood signs in four languages: "*Mepacrine hai?*" "*Nie Weiperzedaj!*" "*Pas de dedoublement!*" and "*Swat that fly!*" Vehicles were jammed bumper to tailboard in both directions: Shermans and Bren carriers, ambulances and staff cars, wounded Poles returning, a "three-star" American General going forward, begoggled despatch riders white with dust, and jeeps, jeeps, jeeps swerving through the traffic everywhere.

It was a glimpse of the complex activities behind the lines in modern war: the vast reserves of ammunition, the supply and maintenance parks, the signal organisations, hospital staffs, traffic police, and twenty other kinds of special troops. Things



were going well. The sun shone, and there was a grin on many a sweat-and-dust-lined face.

At the headquarters of the 8th (Indian) Division I picked up Captain Nayar, the divisional conducting officer, who had been out with the troops ever since dawn, but gladly agreed to return there again. Three days previously, when on his way to the Gari Crossing (on the night of May 11th), his jeep had been wedged tight in a traffic block, unable to move, so he walked twenty miles on foot to see the fight. That was characteristic. Everywhere we went officers and men welcomed him as a friend.

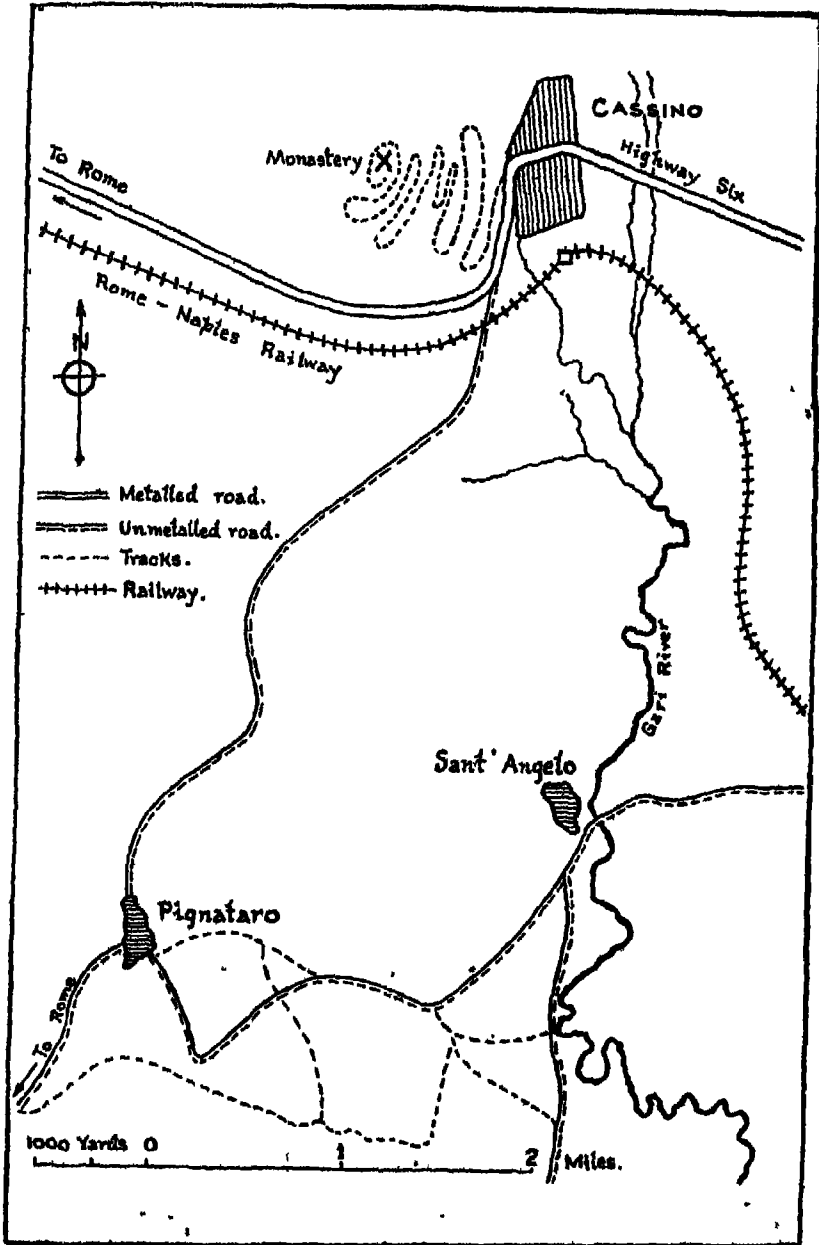
Turning off Highway 6, we dodged between endless north-bound convoys along the dusty, shell-pocked "Speedy" track which circled and twisted down to the smoke-guarded crossings of the Gari. Confusingly, the Gari is called the Rapido in its upper reaches, then the Gari, then the Garigliano near the coast. At the point where it was crossed by the 8th Division<sup>1</sup> on the night of May 11th-12th, south of the village of Sant'Angelo, it is ten feet deep, thirty broad, fast-flowing, with treacherous banks. On the far side lie swamps and a wet corn-field extending to the low plateau on which Sant'Angelo stands.

No preparation for crossing could be made near the river itself, since surprise was vital. Bailey bridges and collapsible boats were assembled in rear, where a thousand guns awaited "H hour."

It was a misty evening, and the fog had increased by 11 o'clock, when the silence was shattered by the flash and roar of a barrage such as had not been seen or heard up to that time on any front, not even at El Alamein.

Boats and bridges were brought down under cover of the barrage, and the crossing began. Some of the craft were swamped, and many of the men who reached the far bank lost their way, for even the directional tracer shells could not be seen in the fog. Still they stumbled on, falling into ditches and scrambling out, soaking wet. By midnight there was a precarious bridge-head.

<sup>1</sup> The 8th (Indian) Division was formed in October, 1940, left for Iraq in 1941, and was the first Indian Division to land in Italy. Since January of last year it has been commanded by Major-General E. Russell, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.



GARI CROSSING.

By this time the enemy had begun to counter-attack fiercely, and had laid down a heavy artillery concentration on the bridging trains of the Bengal Sappers and Miners. Two of the three company commanders of the gallant working parties were killed; nevertheless, the Sappers carried on, and "Oxford Bridge," started at 2.30 a.m., was finished five hours later, under murderous rifle and mortar fire. At 8.45 a.m. on May 12th the first Sherman tank went across, followed by long columns of armoured fighting vehicles. It was an historic moment: the beginning of the march that led to Rome.

Much remained to do, for on that morning the issue of the battle was still in doubt. There had been heavy casualties, and the enemy was fighting desperately. Only good discipline and the initiative of junior leaders carried the Indian troops forward from the Gari Crossing.

Amongst those who distinguished themselves was nineteen-year-old Sepoy Kamal Ram, of a Punjab battalion, who attacked a machine-gun post single-handed, shot one gunner, bayoneted a second, and shot a German officer. He attacked another post, killed the gunner, and captured the remainder of the men there. Yet another post did he attack, this time with his section havildar; it also was captured, and later in the action he killed another of the enemy in a slit trench, and took two more prisoners. "By his courage and initiative," the citation to his V.C. runs, "he enabled his company to secure vital ground." Deeds such as these cracked the Gustav Line on May 13th.

When I reached the 8th Division, on May 14th, it was tired, happy, and still advancing. A Punjab battalion, through which another battalion had just passed in pursuit, fell asleep by the roadside instantly, in its tracks; all save the weary signallers and the officers, who had remained booted and unwashed for three days. The strain on the higher ranks of an Indian unit in battle is very heavy because on them (and on them alone: few of the junior ranks can speak English) falls the liaison work with supporting tanks, aircraft and artillery which is now an integral part of war.

My first stop was to see a battalion of Frontier Force Rifles which had just been ordered to attack Pignataro, at the apex of the hilly country beyond which lies the Liri Valley plain.

Company officers arrived at headquarters, in a ruined farmhouse. Orders were issued, watches synchronised; within ten

minutes the advance began. Battles seldom look like manœuvres, but the beginning of this one did, except that German prisoners were burying a comrade in the neighbourhood.

The colonel of this battalion was British; his second-in-command and two of the company commanders were Punjabis, and his adjutant was a Parsi. Amongst those attending the conference were two Canadian tank liaison officers, who spoke to me enthusiastically about their Indian comrades.

Although the colonel was obviously very busy, yet so smoothly did things proceed that he had time to tell me of his men's part in the Gari Crossing, and draw a sketch map. He introduced me to Jemadar Abdul Hamid, a Punjabi Moslem, who had been recommended for an immediate award. Two days previously he led his platoon forward from the river, although it had been reduced by casualties to only thirteen men, to attack two enemy pill-boxes south of Sant'Angelo; he had killed two and captured twelve Germans in the first position, and had killed four and captured thirteen in the second: indeed, a crowded hour of glorious life!

I followed the attack across a lovely, undulating countryside of cornfields and red poppies, with flowering hedgerows; then I branched off to see a file of German prisoners—about eighty of them—returning under the escort of a couple of Sikhs. The enemy had been winkled out of an artificial cave further down the road, and thither I went.

The narrow entrance and dark, long stairway did not prepare me for the amazing sight I beheld when someone switched on the electric light: it was an enormous cave, 50 yards long by 5 broad, and 40 feet deep; all dug by Italian labour. It was floored with duck-boards and lined with shelves, on which had been packed overcoats, socks, biscuits, chocolates, small arm ammunition, and solid methylated spirits. All had been removed by a British salvage unit, except the methylated spirits, and I was told that the clothing and food were of excellent quality.

On the way back to divisional headquarters I stopped at Sant'Angelo, to see the German defences of which I had heard so much, and the outposts of the Gustav Line. Dead men lay still unburied, and amidst the litter there was evidence of their hurried retreat—arms, ammunition and equipment scattered in disorder. I found a pile of new overcoats, and was tempted to

take one with me, but was dissuaded by the practical Nayar, who reminded me of the restrictions on luggage by air. Salvage parties were at work in the ruins, and prisoners, pale with two days' immurement in cellars, were still surrendering. Clearly the Germans had meant to stay in these defences. They were as nearly impregnable as good siting could make them; what they lacked were good troops to man them, and aircraft and artillery support.

\* \* \*

When darkness fell on May 14th there was another tremendous bombardment of enemy positions, and as it was impossible to sleep I climbed up a hillside near divisional headquarters. The warm spring night was "thick inlaid with patens of bright gold," not only by stars, but also by glow-worms; and again the "immortal bird," heard by Boccaccio and by Keats and by British gunners at the Gari Crossing, poured forth his soul, ecstatic, eternal, undismayed:

No hungry generations tread thee down,  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

For an hour nightingales sang above the roar of guns. And all night long, past divisional headquarters, armour and still more armour clanked and rumbled along Highway 6.

In my sleeping-bag I thought of the enemy crouching in their shelters. Not many were actually killed in the shelling, perhaps, but only the best of the German troops can endure such a hammering with nerves unbroken. When the barrage lifts, and the troops go forward, a white flag appears and the old cry of "Kamerad!" is heard, recalling that other war the Germans lost.

\* \* \*

At breakfast General Russell told me of an adventure that had befallen him the previous day in that identical village where Nayar and I had been. He was looking into a ruined cellar, when he saw a handkerchief being waved. "Come out!" he ordered, but the waving continued, for the Germans were too frightened to move. Eventually the General routed out three

bedraggled Boches at the point of his revolver. He put them into his jeep, and handed them over to the nearest anti-aircraft gunners. "The only thing I'm sorry about," he said with a chuckle, "is that they didn't try to escape." The laugh lay in the fact that he is a dead shot.

Going forward that morning my jeep was again sandwiched between colossal convoys, and progress was slow. Once I was entangled in the trailing camouflage net of a returning truck, which caught me like a fish, and nearly landed me in Kingdom Come. However, I managed to get put back into the flow of north-bound traffic. Then the brakes went wrong, but miraculously this happened near a workshop, which kindly put them right. And twice I lost my way in the dusty détours of the "Speedy" track, and again in the smoke that still guarded the Gari bridges. All of which was annoying, yet I was more or less where I wanted to be, amidst the Indian Army.

I sought a clue from traffic control police which would take me to a cavalry regiment—now a light armoured reconnaissance unit—which I knew was somewhere in the neighbourhood. Soon my luck changed, and I found its Sikh squadron, which was commanded by a son of the well-loved housemaster of my public school.

A "recce" unit is not thrown into the first thrust, so its work was beginning now: the squadron was, in fact, preparing to go forward. Jemadar Kirpal Singh and Acting-lance-dafadar Kehar Singh had both received the I.D.S.M. for an exploit on the Adriatic front some months previously. This was no time to fight battles over again, but I gathered that these two, with only a handful of men, had cleared a large village held in strength by the enemy, killing six Germans and capturing six. . . . The cavalry spirit survives, and hearts beat as high as they ever did, amongst these stalwart yeomen.

Kehar Singh looked incredibly solemn while we talked. What I said I cannot remember, but his face suddenly brightened. Afterwards the squadron leader told me: "That's the first time that anyone has made him laugh." Personally I felt more like crying, because I was not thirty years younger, commanding a squadron of armoured cars.

\* \* \*

Finally I struck the right road to Pignataro, and came to a

hedgerow where I had to leave my jeep. Thinking to console my driver, who would have liked to come on, I gave him a German helmet I had picked up. He regarded it scornfully, and remarked that he would get plenty of them as we advanced.

\* \* \*

As the fields ahead were mined I stopped to ask my way from a section of Pathans, who invited me into their dug-out. The tea they gave me was made Pathan-fashion, with boiling milk instead of water. They were eager for news of their Frontier. Not a question did they ask on politics, but many on crops, prices, and the progress of the war. I denied the rumour of a landing at Marseilles, then spreading through the troops. They roared with laughter over their general capturing those three Germans in Sant'Angelo. This was a good war, they said, far better than the Middle East.

On reaching Pignataro I found that the Frontier Force Rifles had had a sharp fight for it the previous day. They had been held up at sundown, and it was very easy to see why. The village was a fortress, standing on a bare, rocky height, with an open field of fire surrounding it on every side. However, the barrage had done its work, and Pignataro was now in ruins. Most of the Germans had left in a hurry.

A few were still being mopped up, and in the shattered main street—Via Roma it was called, for it led to the capital—several hundred prisoners were being assembled.

One lonely prisoner had just been found in hiding: a young, pale, frightened little corporal, with the Iron Cross. As soon as his pockets had been emptied and the contents labelled he was told to sit down. When his guard gave him a cigarette and someone offered him a drink, his amazement was comical.

Passing through the open doorway of one of the few houses which had remained intact, I came upon a garden such as one does not often see in Italy, with nasturtiums and pansies and roses in bloom. Further on there was a ruined church, where the smell of incense still lingered. Further down the street an Indian officer gave me a German compass. I begged him to keep it, explaining I was only a writer, with no use for such tools now, alas! "I want you to have it," he said. "It will be something by which you will remember us when you are back in England."

When I returned down the Via Roma the little corporal had recovered his composure. He was sitting amidst a group of Indians eating a sandwich, and holding forth in German to a silent, apparently interested audience. He had given away his Iron Cross, and no doubt he thought was creating a good impression, but the fact was that the soldiers were looking, rather than listening; they were resting. From the other end of the village came bursts of machine-gun fire, where the little corporal's comrades were still being liquidated.

\* \* \*

General Alexander asked me to lunch in his modest villa at Caserta, near the elaborate Bourbon palace.

I arrived early, and wondered what I should say to him at such a great moment. I need not have worried. We talked of Ireland, of past Eton and Harrow matches, of India, where he had commanded a brigade at Risalpur, of Italian wines, and of Corsica—but only as a pleasure resort. Not a ripple of care crossed the flow of his lively conversation. He seemed to have all the time in the world, but I noticed afterwards that the meal had taken exactly half an hour.

"Is there anything I can do to help you in your work?" he asked. His A.D.C. was looking at his wrist-watch, and a line of staff-cars stood in the street outside.

"I should like your opinion of the Indian soldier, Sir."

"He's a splendid fighting man. You can't praise him too highly, and you may say I said so!"

\* \* \*

I was invited to see the map-rooms of the Allied Air Forces at headquarters. In gilded apartments, where princes and prelates had once dallied, and where typewriters now clicked and telephones buzzed, I could see, on maps and charts and photographs, what air power was doing to the enemy.

Air-ground co-operation has been built up over years of trial and error. The Germans know well enough how a brigade commander can call up a waiting squadron of bombers to rub out a strongpoint (they have seen it done often enough), but they have neither the men nor the machines to copy the Allied technique. That was one "secret." The other was how every road and railway behind the enemy front was being cut or



crushed, day by day, sometimes hour by hour, just where it hurts most. It was fascinating to see this strangling of supply lines at work on the wall maps: to see the tabs marking German convoys moving south, and the tabs showing Allied 'planes flying north; to read reports of damage done; and to compare pictures of bridges before and after attention by various types of bomber. If this battle lasted another ten days, my mentor said, the Germans would have no supplies left. Nor had they.

Within a week they had retired, and along Highway Six Indian troops were in pursuit, supported by Canadian tanks.

## EPILOGUE

### *Climbing Cassino*

ON my last day in Italy, Indian troops were in the Liri Valley beyond Monte Cassino.

By the side of Highway Six an Indian despatch rider lay stunned or dead by his shattered bicycle, with a comrade guarding him.

As I parked my jeep under Monastery Hill and started to climb its south-west face, I could not but think of all the lives that India has given, is giving,<sup>1</sup> and must yet give in causes which are not always directly in defence of her frontiers, and which cannot always come home to her as closely as they do to us in battered Europe. Nevertheless, she has given the United Nations two million soldiers and some four million war workers. Do we realise the extent of her contribution?

An American officer said to me only the other day: "I've seen some of your Indian recruits, and they are a fine bunch. But why aren't there more of them? You say two million is a big number. All right. I grant you it's a big number of volunteers, but why don't they apply conscription and get four million or even eight million soldiers?"

One answer is, of course, that the intake must be conditioned by the number of men who can be trained and equipped; but there is another, more cogent, reason. India would starve if she were mobilised for total war; it would be impossible to take more men off the land, because she is not a mechanised nation, especially in agriculture.

Certainly she is becoming a more mechanised nation, as anyone who has read this book will agree. But these things cannot be achieved overnight.

What has been achieved is a miracle. I have giped at the Indian Government in my time for its slow and bureaucratic ways, and it will probably irritate me again as I sit by the fireside in my slippers; but as regards its war effort in recent years it has nothing to be ashamed of. As to the fighting men,

<sup>1</sup> 45,000 killed and wounded, 78,000 prisoners up to June, 1944.

they have earned renown of which they should be proud to their lives' end.

What can we do, we British, who have been associated with India for two centuries and more, to show our gratitude to the comrades without whom we could not have held the Middle East in 1941, or India herself in 1942? Two things we might do. We should spare no effort to improve the social conditions to which the veterans will return, and we at home should try to know them better.

As regards rehabilitation, there is, as I have indicated, a large sum earmarked for the districts from which the volunteers have come. They made no bargain with us, set no price on their services. Let us see to it, as far as we can (the administration of India is no longer chiefly in British hands), that they are treated generously. Their dead will not have made the sacrifice in vain if those who return have the chance of a fuller, healthier, and less faction-ridden life. All classes and creeds will have served together in disciplined communities and will have learned, in the comradeship of battle, to co-operate for a common purpose. If this lesson can be carried to the villages there is no limit to what India may achieve.

As regards understanding, Britain and India have much to give each other, quite outside the clash and confusion of political argument. India needs and deserves our friendship and respect, and we hers. Without them good advice on either side will always pass unheeded.

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It is a long pull up the rocky, thorny slope to the Monastery. Pictures of India go flashing through my mind: Jat paratroops, Sikhs in Tamu, the Nawab of Bhopal smoking a silver *hookah*, "Elephant Bill," a Japanese prisoner bowing over his soup, and my black-bereted friends of the Indian Armoured Corps.

Other pictures I also see which I have not described: a Maharani at lunch, a caste-mark between her flashing eyes, and pearls glowing at her lovely throat, describing *purdah* life, and telling us how she had enjoyed its sweet simplicities; a Maharajah at dinner explaining that God appears on earth in three aspects—as a peepul tree in the plant creation, as a tiger in the animal world, and as a king amongst mankind; Lord Louis Mountbatten saying that Indian builders can hustle

when they choose, and showing me, from the veranda of his office, a thousand coolies (they seemed) making bricks fly from hand to hand in endless chains, building him a map-room in twenty-four hours; a Yogi friend, looking out over the morning radiance of the Jumna, while a Brahmini bull nibbled the mat on which he was sitting; a *muezzin* in his tower, singing the dawn call to prayer in a voice so glorious that it still rings in my ears; children playing tip-cat with superb skill; a tomb on the Ridge at Delhi where green parrots are fed by a girl in the scented twilight, while jackals howl through the old graveyard below; and the grace of Indian women: their bright *saris*, the sway of their barefoot walk, the beauty of their gestures as they bow in a shrine, or sweep a street, or scatter rose-leaves in a sacred river.

"Old forms go trooping past," and might have been woven into the background; but it is too late. This book goes to press amidst the racket of flying bombs.

General Alexander's praise of Indian soldiers has been repeated to me, in other forms, by all who have commanded these brave men. The only criticisms come from foreigners and from men who have not seen them in battle. They have been called "mercenaries," although they receive a fraction only of the pay of other troops. But they could have earned more in factories—and in safety.

Money counts little with them, compared to *izzat*, which means honour and self-respect. Their fathers were soldiers before them, and they have been proud and eager to follow the tradition.

Proud and eager they have been to maintain their *izzat*. It is a precious thing, this high sense of honour, a support in peril and a rock on which much may be built in the coming years.

\* \* \*

At the summit of the Monastery there are torn missals, shell-cases, blood-stained bandages, everywhere the wreckage of war. Lashed to the topmost ruins, the red-and-white standard of the Poles and the Union Jack are straining in a high wind.

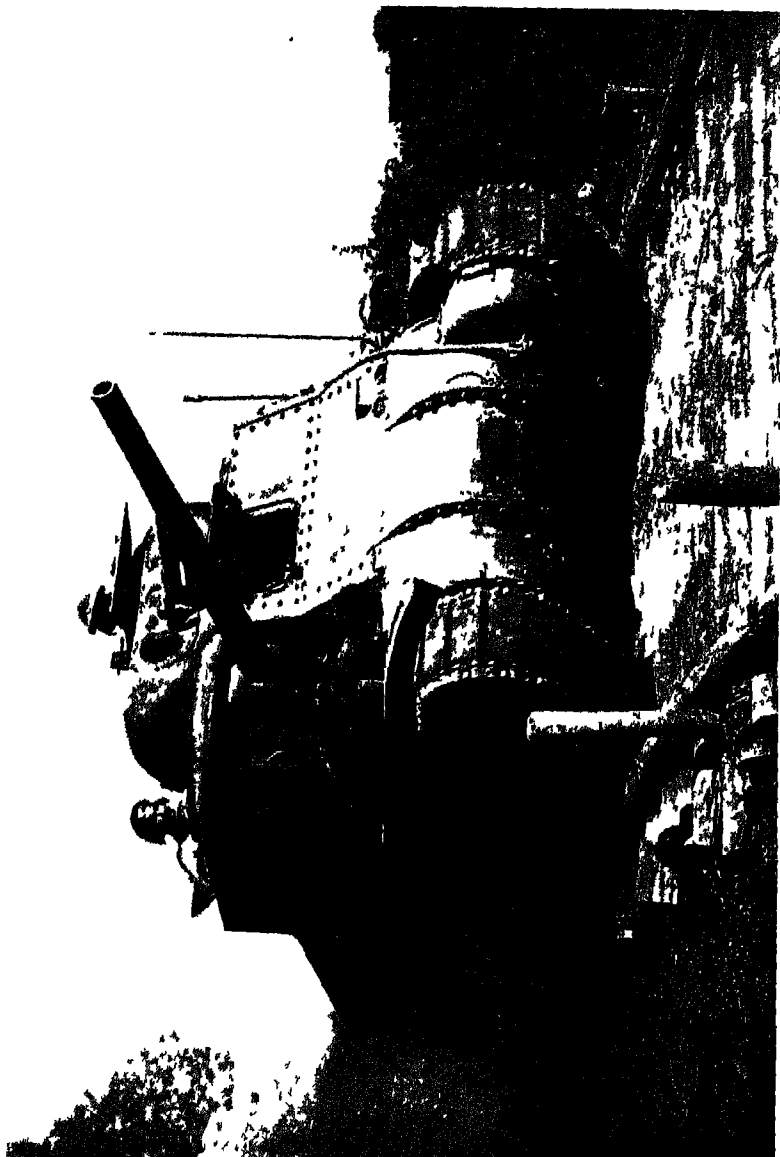
In the fading light a single 'plane circles—an artillery spotter. Now the guns are beginning to flash, heralds of an advance by Indian troops. Their story is still unfolding. Those plumes of white dust, far over the plain, are Canadian tanks

in close support of Punjabis, Sikhs, Gurkhas and Mahrattas, who are attacking Piedmont and Pontecorvo, opening the path to Rome, and beyond.

I wish there were more of them in Europe to share in the victory, but the day of the other divisions will come, when the skies over the Japanese are dark with avenging wings.

These men are our brothers-in-arms. There is sometimes a gulf between our ways of thinking, but never between our ways of fighting. Indians in battle have earned the respect of friend and foe throughout history, and all over the world.

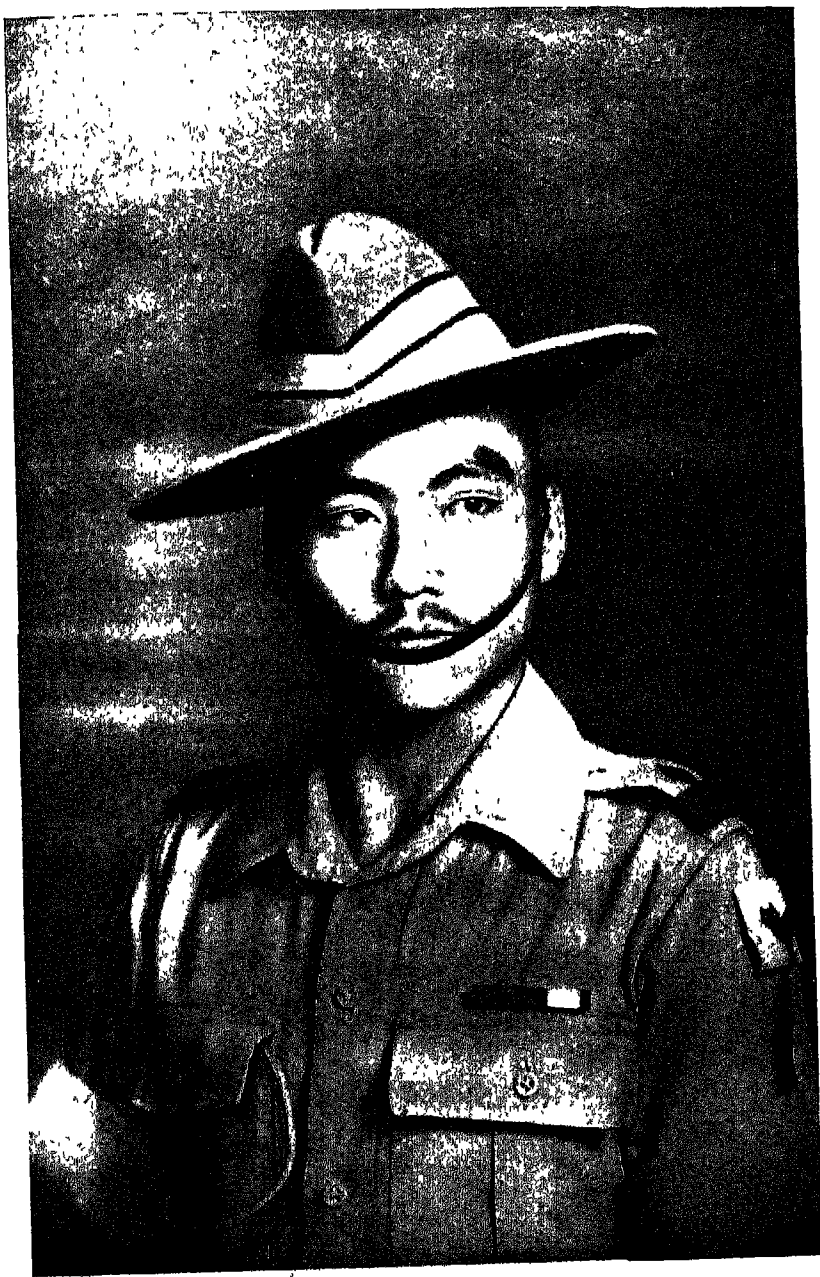
Today millions of them and millions of us are engaged in a common task. They have died for us, and we for them. Out of our sorrows and sacrifices, in so many lands, out of our courage and endurance, by sea and air, is born a trust and comradeship that shall not perish.



*Indian Armoured Corps*



*Patrol on Burma front*



*Jemadar Gaje Ghale, V.C., 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles*





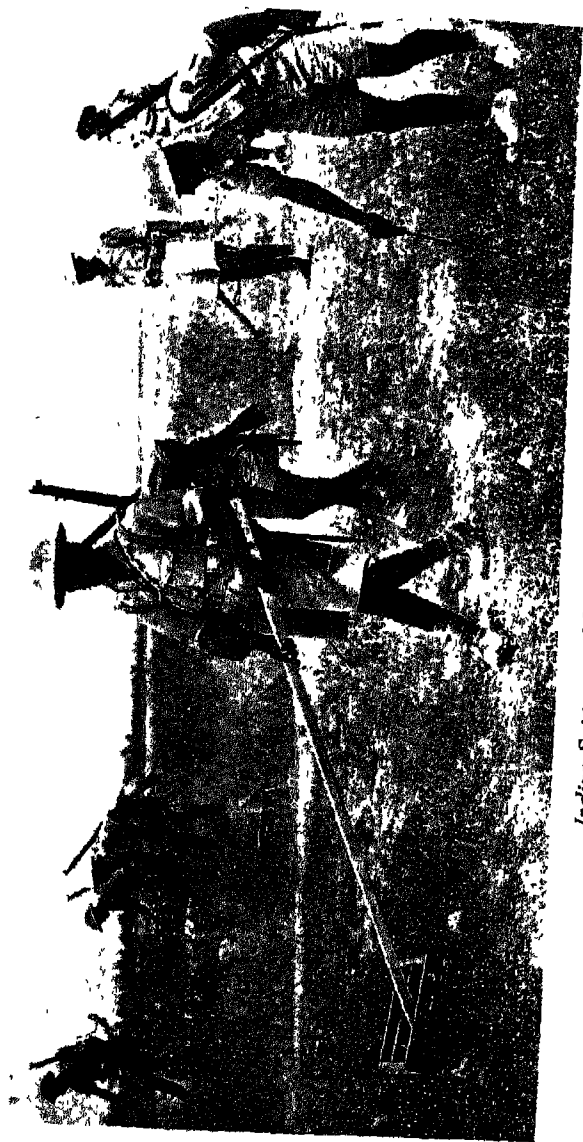
*Fording a river in Burma*



*A timber elephant at work, with pupal attached*



*In the Burmese jungle*



*Indian Sappers and Miners clearing a minefield*



*General Sir Harold Alexander inspecting Indian troops*